



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

-PRT Medical Training Gives Hope to Iraqi Doctors-

By Barry Greenberg
Special Correspondent

April 25, 2008

Nasiriyah, Dhi Qar - Innovative medical training by U.S. military doctors working with Provisional Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) has given to hope to a group of Iraqi doctors long cut off from professional associations because of turmoil in their country.

Twenty-one medical residents from Samawa General Hospital, located in neighboring Muthanna Province, traveled recently to Tallil Air Base near Nasiriyah for a day-long program of medical training, courtesy of two PRTs operating in southern Iraq.



Welcoming atmosphere impresses women residents

The Iraqis are completing their medical training at the main hospital serving the residents of Muthanna Province, a poor, rural area of southern Iraq. U.S. Army Brigade Surgeon Colonel Thomas Dove, a cardiologist, taught the seminar organized by the PRTs in Dhi Qar and Muthanna provinces.

More than 800 volunteers in 25 PRTs and 4 smaller provincial support teams now operate reconstruction and stabilization programs in Iraq's 18 provinces.

When asked about the benefits of the training program, Dr. Farouk, a resident at Samawa Hospital, said, "We've been cut off from the world for a long time. As doctors, we know we need to stay abreast of the latest developments. What we are learning here today will help us save the life of a patient." Turning to Dr. Dove, Dr. Farouk said, "The best gift we could have is your presence here in Iraq."

In addition to the group from Muthanna, one medical resident joined the group from Baghdad; another came from Najaf. Both heard the glowing reviews from the previous week's seminar and were invited by their colleagues from Samawa Hospital.

Dr. Milad, a woman resident who made the journey from Muthanna, said she felt comfortable attending the seminar because her colleagues from the previous session told her the Americans are very hospitable. "I wanted to expand my knowledge, but it is difficult for women," she said. The two women resident who made up the group kept a respectful distance from their male colleagues and American instructors during the course of the seminar. They sat together at one corner of the long conference room table, but actively participated in the discussions.

During the lunch break, the men gathered around the buffet table piling sandwiches and slices of pizza onto their plates, and the women sat separately on the far side of the room quietly eating and talking.

Midway through the lunch, two women U.S. soldiers assigned to the medical unit, SGT Haddon and SPC Sechrest, joined them for a slice of pizza. Within minutes, their corner was filled with lively conversation and enjoyment as the Iraqis clearly relished the occasion to converse in a safe, same-gender environment.

This is the third training session organized by Dr. Dove who traveled previously to Samawa Hospital and, for the second week in a row, brought medical residents from the Muthanna-based hospital to Tallil. The Advanced Cardiac Life Support training seminar he previously organized for 12 medical residents proved so successful that many of the original participants returned along with a new crop of doctors.

Another participant in the medical seminar, Dr. Mohamed Hassan, praised both the value of the instruction as well as the newfound camaraderie with his American medical colleagues. "It was really amazing experience today. Everybody was full of energy. None of us will forget this day."

After returning to Samawa Hospital, Dr. Hassan sent a note of thanks to Dr. Dove and the members of the Muthanna PRT in which he said: "It's not about learning something new or using our hands in a perfect way. It just brings life to our job again after many years of rage, wars, bombs, and bloody bodies.

"We were switched off, working without feeling," he added. "When you see yourself watching people dying, others crying and suffering, and when you see yourself losing your close friends and relatives, you hate yourself because you put yourself in such a pitiful situation.

"We are doctors in competition with death, but today we know how important we are. Life has begun to flow in my medical body. It is again great to be a doctor. Thank you."