



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

## 2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

### -Kirkuk PRT Partners with Iraqi Authorities to Fight Cholera-

By Martin Miller  
Special Correspondent

August 19, 2008

**Forward Operating Base Warrior, Kirkuk Province, Iraq** - The heat of summer arrives in Iraq each year accompanied by an unwelcome health problem: cholera. The Kirkuk Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) and Iraqi Government authorities are working hard in partnership to combat this scourge.

Earlier this spring, Kirkuk Governor Abdurrahman Mustafa met the cholera problem head on. The provincial leader held regular meetings with city administrators and public health officials throughout the province to discuss public health and infrastructure issues related to controlling an outbreak.

The Director General of Health for Kirkuk Province who represents the central government in Baghdad, Dr. Sabah Amin Ahmad, also participated. At the same time, his office distributed chlorine tablets to sanitize water, created isolation wards in the province's hospitals for cholera cases, stocked hospitals with re-hydration fluids, and designed pamphlets to educate the public about cholera prevention.

To complement these efforts Kirkuk PRT Team Leader Howard Keegan asked the Team's Public Health Unit headed by Dr. Stacy Lamon, to determine what assistance the PRT could lend.

Dr. Lamon along with the PRT's U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) representative, Dr. Jeff Ashley, began to develop assistance ideas. One result was a cholera digital videoconferencing (DVC) education program, arranged through an American non-governmental organization (NGO) called WiRED International.

WiRED International, founded by Gary Selnow, a professor at San Francisco State University and former diplomat with the U.S. Information Agency, provides on- and off-line medical educational resources to doctors and nurses in conflict areas around the world.



*Iraqi doctors interacting with cholera experts in Bangladesh in a DVC sponsored by the Kirkuk PRT*

Since 2003 the U.S. State Department has supported WiRED's efforts in Iraq to develop medical information centers and telemedicine studios at large teaching hospitals and medical schools. WiRED set up videoconferencing studios in Mosul and Baghdad that can link Iraqi health care workers with experts in the United States and elsewhere.

For the cholera DVC, Selnow, through contacts at Harvard, was able to locate a group of world renowned experts in infectious diseases to interact with the Kirkuk health authorities. The DVC connected five Kirkuk doctors representing the Directorate General of Health and local hospitals to the International Centre for Diarrheal Disease Research (ICDDR,B) in Bangladesh. All participants felt the DVC was successful in exchanging information concerning cholera diagnosis, treatment, and vaccination usage and they agreed to continue future interaction by email.

Combining the expertise of WiRED International with the knowledge of the ICDDR,B proved to be an extremely efficient tool, said Kirkuk PRT's Dr. Lamon. "The videoconference proved to be a major success for two reasons: It allowed for communication between healthcare experts in Kirkuk and national and international experts in Bangladesh and it demonstrated the power and potential of videoconferencing in the areas of health and public health," Lamon explained.

Dr. Sabah Ahmad agreed noting, "The discussion was highly effective and gave us more power and knowledge to modify our cholera control plan. We wish for more teleconferences with other medical professionals from different places to share their experiences and to improve our (medical) programs."