

**A humanitarian effort  
by the department of surgery  
of the USUHS to a third-world country:**

# **THE PHILIPPINES**

**by David C. Wherry, MD, FACS, FRCS, DMCC;  
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In 1899, during the start of the U.S. occupation of the Philippines, an American military hospital, the Philippine Civil Hospital, was opened. Maj. John McDill, a U.S. Army surgeon serving in the Philippines, subsequently made a recommendation for a general hospital. In 1906, plans were made for a 120-bed pavilion type of hospital patterned after the Eppendorf Hospital in Hamburg, Germany. The Philippine General Hospital (PGH) opened in 1910, with Major McDill the first head of the department of surgery.

Since that time, PGH has developed into a 1,500-bed hospital for the indigent and has become the premier teaching hospital of the Philippines. It is funded by the Philippine government via the University of the Philippines (UP) and, along with the medical school, is located on the university's Manila campus. As of World War II, the department of surgery has developed the same divisions that exist in American surgical departments and has in-training for 80 to 90 surgical residents. To have a faculty appointment in the department is considered a high honor.

### ***Creation of a humanitarian program***

In 1996, two of the authors (DW and NR) traveled to the Philippines as representatives of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS) to meet with officers of the Philippine College of Surgeons regarding development of a humanitarian support program. Several of the officers were from PGH, and it soon became apparent that because it was a hospital for the indigent—and, like USUHS, a government-funded university—our efforts should be directed toward PGH.

In subsequent meetings with the then-chairman of the department of surgery, Romeo Gutierrez, MD, FPCS, the dean of the medical school and the chancellor of the University of the Philippines, we learned that many of the staff had trained in the U.S. and their clinical skills were excellent but there was a lack of surgeons trained in research.

After the development of a memorandum of understanding between the USUHS and PGH departments of surgery, the universities, and the governments, USUHS began with a hu-

manitarian effort of having either a PGH junior staff member, or a surgeon just completing his or her residency or fellowship, spend one year in the USUHS department of surgery as a research scientist working in the laboratory only, as a team member on ongoing research projects.

The PGH surgeon selected for this program was competitively chosen by members of the department of surgery of both universities and by the U.S. State Department regional medical officer stationed in the Philippines. It is understood by verbal agreement that the PGH surgeon will return to the Philippines after completion of the year of research, or if he or she remains in the U.S. for a fellowship, he or she is to return after the fellowship is completed.

### ***Program participants***

Since the beginning of this humanitarian program in 1998, the following 10 surgeons have completed or will complete the program (see photos, page 28):

- Eric Talens, MD, came to USUHS when he was a junior consultant in the department of surgery of PGH. He returned to PGH and is now the head of the division of trauma and editor of the *Philippine Journal of Trauma*.

- May Punzalan, MD, came to USUHS after completing her residency in general surgery. After her year at USUHS, she returned to PGH, completed a fellowship in colorectal surgery, and became the first female colorectal surgeon in the Philippines.

- Leoncio Kaw, Jr., MD, completed general surgery residency at PGH, then after the year at USUHS did a fellowship in critical care with David Hoyt, MD, FACS, in California and one year of vascular training at the Scripps Clinic. He then returned to PGH and is now a clinical associate professor of surgery at UP College of Medicine and an attending surgeon at the UP-Philippine General Hospital.

- Gemma Uy, MD, completed general surgery residency at PGH; after the year at USUHS, she returned to PGH, completed a fellowship in surgical oncology, and is now a staff surgeon in surgical oncology at PGH.

- Racel Ireneo Querol, MD, completed gen-

## USUHS program participants



Dr. Talens



Dr. Punzalan



Dr. Kaw



Dr. Uy



Dr. Querol



Dr. Ayuste



Dr. Gonzales



Dr. Talip



Dr. Delima



Dr. Parreno-Sacdalan

eral surgery residency at PGH and then after the year at USUHS, he returned to PGH and completed a fellowship in cardiothoracic surgery. He is now working on a fellowship in thoracic surgery at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN. He will return to PGH as a cardiothoracic surgeon.

- Eduardo Ayuste, MD, who came to USUHS as a junior faculty at PGH, is back at PGH in the division of trauma. He was honored in 2007 as one of 10 Outstanding Young Scientists in the Philippines.

- Earl Gonzales, MD, completed general

surgery residency at PGH and after two years at USUHS, because of a multiplicity of reasons from all parties involved, remains in the U.S. and has just restarted a second full residency in a general surgery program.

- Babie Normita Talip, MD, completed general surgery residency at PGH and after the year at USUHS, she returned to the Philippines and plans to start her fellowship in pediatric surgery in January 2009 at PGH. After completion, she will practice in northern Mindanao.

- Mariam Grace Delima, MD, completed her general surgery residency and a fellowship in cardiothoracic surgery before coming to USUHS. She returned to the Philippines in February 2008, hoping to complete a further fellowship in pediatric cardiac surgery in Beijing or a thoracic oncology fellowship in Japan and then return to the Philippines.

- Dione Parreno-Sacdalan, MD, completed her residency at PGH in December 2007 and started at USUHS in January of this year. (The PGH residency rotations are from January 1 to December 31 of each year). When the USUHS program is complete, she plans to return to PGH and complete a subspecialty fellowship.

The 10 research scientists have been first authors on four publications (see box on this page) and co-authors on 15 publications.

#### **Program success**

Support and funding have come from a wide variety of sources, including the USU Surgical Associates, which initiated the Ramon De Jesus and David Wherry Mabuhay Endowment that is now located at the Henry M. Jackson



Philippine General Hospital

### **Articles with PGH-USUHS research scholars listed as first author**


- Kaw LL, Punzalan CK, Crisostomo AC, Bowyer MW, Wherry DC. Surgical pathology of colorectal cancer in Filipinos: Implications for clinical practice. *J Am Coll Surg*. 2002;195(2):188-195.
- Uy GB, Kaw LL, Punzalan CK, Querol RI, Koustova EV, Bowyer MW, et al. Clinical and molecular biologic characteristics of early-onset versus late-onset colorectal carcinoma in Filipinos. *World J Surg*. 2004;28(2):117-123.
- Ayuste EC, Chen H, Koustova E, et al. Hepatic and pulmonary apoptosis after hemorrhagic shock in swine can be reduced through modifications of conventional Ringer's solution. *J Trauma*. 2006;60(1):52-63.
- Gonzales E, Chen H, Munuve R, et al. Valproic acid prevents hemorrhage-associated lethality and affects the acetylation pattern of cardiac histones. *Shock*. 2006;25(4):1-8.

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Foundation; the Department of Surgery International Relations Committee; and the PGH department of surgery. Other resources remain potential options for the future to continue these important exchanges. The Ramon De Jesus and David Wherry Mabuhay Endowment has recently started supporting USUHS medical students doing an elective surgery rotation at the PGH.

The Diploma in the Medical Care of Catastrophes (DMCC), under the auspices of the Apothecaries of London, has been extremely important in the exchange between the USUHS department of surgery and PGH because it has been mutually supportive. An oral examination and written dissertation are required, and many natural disasters, ranging from typhoons to volcanic eruptions, in the Philippines have been addressed in the written dissertations. All surgeons participating in our exchange program have been successful in securing their DMCC. Based on their success there has also been an independent examination for the DMCC in Manila in November 2006 with successful completion to date by eight of nine candidates. Diplomates holding DMCC in the Philippines are fourth in the world in number behind the U.K., the U.S., and The Netherlands. This provides additional international exchange opportunities for the UP-PGH.

Since returning to PGH, these research scientists who have completed the year at USUHS are not only progressing academically but will one day be among the leaders of surgery in the Philippines. Most are involved in clinical research and are meeting the need of PGH for young surgeons trained in research.

This long-term humanitarian effort has proven to all concerned that it is one of the best ways to help developing countries and their hospitals and universities in not only elevating the academic abilities of their faculty but also enhancing research-oriented patient care. 

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### **Disclaimer**

The opinions in this article are those of the authors, and not of the U.S. government/Department of Defense.

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