

NURSE'S *Notes*

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF NURSING

A Dedication to Service

As part of the St. John's Mercy family, we are called to act as co-ministers in the Sisters of Mercy broad services. We are often reminded of the core values established by the Sisters, most often the service value, and are asked to use our resources to serve those who are less fortunate. Many of us choose to carry out our service in our churches, schools and communities. One nursing co-worker has dedicated his life to serving a community of people who have no real access to health care resources.

John Havican, RN, a nurse in the Department of Surgery, began his ministry of serving those desperately in need well before he joined the Mercy ministry.

His journey began while serving our country in the Vietnam war. After seeing all of the devastation the region suffered, he decided to go back to Vietnam in 1972 as a civilian volunteer. Havican worked as a carpenter at that time, and began work to help rebuild Minh Quy Hospital in the Central Highlands. He later handled all of the non-medical needs of the hospital and ultimately became the hospital administrator in 1974. He worked closely with the woman who would become his role model in service, Dr. Patricia Smith, founder of the missionary hospital. It was during that time that Havican became inspired to become a nurse. "While I was working with Dr. Smith years ago, she inspired me to help those in need, and she continues to be an inspiration," said Havican.

He and other medical personnel who were working there were evacuated in March 1975. Upon returning home, Havican began nursing school and following his graduation, started work at St. John's Mercy in 1979.

The group of people with whom he had worked at Minh Quy stayed in close touch, always wanting to assist the ethnic minorities, or Montagnard people. Havican was able to return to Vietnam in February 2002, and has returned every year since with medical missions.

The group of friends who had worked together in the early 1970s decided to form a foundation dedicated to serving the medical and basic needs of the ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. The foundation, named Asia Connection, Inc. (ACI), began in its official capacity in 2001. ACI also provides assistance to other regions of southeast Asia. Havican said he is especially proud of the Vietnamese medical staff at the hospital in Saigon, where he brings the Montagnard patients. The staff treat them with compassion, giving them the same care Vietnamese patients would receive.

Havican started participating in medical missions with organizations to perform cleft palate, cleft lip and other plastic surgeries. During those missions, it became evident to him that there was a need for burn reconstruction surgery; however, the teams did not have the professionals or time to do extensive burn reconstruction.

In 2005, Havican asked Dr. Peter Rumbolo of the St. John's Mercy Burn Center if he would be interested in going to Vietnam to help burn survivors. He agreed, and after participating in two missions, they concluded there was a great need to do just burn-focused missions. In May 2006, Havican asked the board of the ACI Foundation if a mission team could work under the auspices of ACI to do burn missions and their own fund raising. The ACI board agreed, and the St. Louis-based Burn and Facial Reconstruction Medical Mission was formed. The first burn-focused mission was in September 2006.



John Havican and Dr. Patricia Smith survey the damage to the hospital compound, planning the rebuilding in May 1973.

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That team not only consists of Havican and Dr. Rumbolo, but also an occupational therapist, burn nurse and anesthetist all from St. John's Mercy, and occasionally medical staff from other parts of the country.

Each of these gifted professionals uses his or her own vacation time to go on the missions in Vietnam. Havican said, "It's not only those going on the missions who are helping, but SJMMC co-workers who collect discarded supplies for the missions and fill in during our absences. Our managers and co-workers have been really supportive, offering encouragement and allowing the time off."

The ACI Foundation also assists a group of religious sisters in the Central Highlands with three clinics, training village midwives. The sisters educate the midwives, and with their time and funding from Asia Connection, over 30 villages now have properly-trained midwives.

The burn missions are funded by donations. The group has received funding through various events hosted by Havican's parish, St. Norbert Catholic Church, as well as an annual donation from the North County District of the Catholic Youth Council. Funds also come from a benefit event, and projects in Austin, Texas. Family and friends assist with donations of money and time.

Havican says he is grateful for the training and experience he has received working at the Medical Center. "The skills I have gained working in the specialties of burn and pediatric plastics have given me the knowledge and experience so that I can do more and help more people on these missions."

If you are interested in more information or donating funds to the burn medical missions, please check the ACI web site: www.asiaconnectioninc.org