

Tulsa doctors giving relief

They're in Indonesia, helping tsunami survivors



Courtesy

Tulsa Dr. Paul Herman (left) is leading a team of doctors volunteering in Indonesia. The group is working in the Banda Aceh region of Sumatra, Indonesia, in one of the areas hardest hit by the Dec. 26 tsunami. The group arrived in Indonesia on Monday and will return to Tulsa on Thursday.

'To be an eyewitness to this kind of destruction is overwhelming.'

MITCHELL DUININCK

A TULSA DOCTOR WHO IS LEADING A TEAM OF DOCTORS IN INDONESIA

By **NICOLE NASCENZI**
World Staff Writer

Treating victims of last month's tsunami requires not only medical skill but counseling expertise.

Tulsa Dr. Mitchell Duinick is leading a team of doctors currently volunteering in Indonesia. The group is working in the Banda Aceh region of Sumatra, Indonesia, in one of the areas hardest-hit by the Dec. 26 tsunami.

The group arrived in Indonesia on Monday and will return to Tulsa on Thursday.

"To be an eyewitness to this kind of destruction is overwhelming," said Duinick in a Friday phone interview from Indonesia.

Duinick said Tulsa doctors are working in local hospitals and makeshift clinics alongside medical professionals from across the globe. They are using interpreters to communicate with patients.

"We spend a lot of time counseling people and listening to stories of great loss," he said. "There is a lot of emotional trauma."

In addition to the psychological toll, tsunami victims are continuing to die from injuries they sustained in the disaster.



Duinick

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Three of the doctors have private practices they put on hold for the relief mission.

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Duinick said his team has seen many adults die from tetanus.

Dr. Chris Jenkins, faculty member at In His Image, explained in a phone interview from his Tulsa office, that tetanus is a disease caused by a bacteria which can enter the body through a wound. Toxins created by the bacteria cause muscle spasms which can be so severe that the spasms cause suffocation.

Jenkins said because so many people sustained cuts during and after the tsunami there is an increased risk of tetanus infection.

In addition to treating cases of tetanus, the doctors in Indonesia are treating patients with other infections and broken bones.

Six of the members of Duinick's group are residents training through a Tulsa-based program called In His Image. The program trains doctors in Christian family practice, but is not affiliated with a university.

In His Image is affiliated with Hillcrest Medical Center and administered through Family Medical Care of Tulsa. Duinick is the director of the residency program.

Three of the doctors, including Duinick, have private practices through Family Medical Care of Tulsa and put their practices on hold for the relief mission to Indonesia.

The doctors are working under the auspices of an Indonesian-based relief program called World Harvest.

Duinick said the weather has been hot — with temperatures in the 90s — but not unbearable.

There are a lot of insects,

and none of the buildings have screens, so doctors are using a lot of insect repellent. Members of the group are sleeping on the floor of two rented houses, but they are happy to have running water. The nearby refugee camp only recently gained access to running water, he said.

Members of Duinick's group are in good health, although many of them are tired because of long work hours.

The death toll from the disaster continues to climb because relief workers are still finding victims during the cleanup efforts.

Duinick said whole villages were swept away by the floods.

Parts of homes are "strewn all over the entire landscape," he said. "People described the tsunami as a great black wall of water."

In His Image may send more doctors to help with future relief efforts in Indonesia, said John McVay, administrator of In His Image.

"There will certainly be a need there for a long time," McVay said.

In His Image officials plan to hold a press conference at 1:30 p.m. Friday at Family Medical Care, 7600 S. Lewis Ave., so Duinick and other members of the group can share their experiences.

In addition, In His Image will host an event scheduled for 7 p.m. Feb. 3 at the Renaissance Hotel, 6808 S. 107th East Ave. The event is open to the public and was organized so Tulsans could learn more about the recent mission to Indonesia.

In His Image is accepting monetary donations to help with the relief work. All donations are tax-deductible. Donations can be mailed to Tsunami Relief Effort, 7600 S. Lewis Ave., Tulsa, OK 74136. More information is also available by calling 493-7816 Ext. 8.

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