

Dr. Casey Lends a Helping Hand in Haiti

Concord Orthopaedics surgeon Dr. Patrick Casey has seen how much good can be done in third world countries, but also how much more can still be done.

As a member of the Haitian Health Foundation, Casey is part of a team of doctors, nurses, dentists and other medical personnel that travel to Haiti to offer their services in an area of the world that badly needs them.

“It’s the most humbling thing I do. It’s rewarding and frustrating at the same time,” Dr. Casey said. “When you see a child with cerebral palsy--and I have a picture of a little girl in a ballerina dress—when she comes in and she can’t walk because her Achilles and her hamstring won’t stretch and you need to do tendon releases, it can make a big difference for her...it’s very rewarding. It’s frustrating when you see people die of pneumonia or have hip dislocations that can’t be put in because they weren’t seen in time, it makes you think of all the good we fail to do as a society for third world countries.”

Founded in 1982 by Dr. Jeremiah Lowney, an orthodontist from Connecticut, the Haitian Health Foundation has grown to serve a community of more than 200,000 people.

In addition to numerous diseases, Dr. Casey said that club foot is a major problem for children in that area.

“Club feet a lot of times can be corrected with tendon releases and casting. So that’s a good third world solution, meaning it’s not dependent on a lot of heavy equipment,” Dr. Casey said. “There are doctors there who can change the casting and for the next two to three months try to keep the foot in a better position. People who have club feet have trouble walking, and if you can get the foot so that it’s flat it really can make a big difference in a child’s life.”

Diseases that are not common in the United States are also problematic and rampant in Haiti.

“There’s problems with cholera, with TB and diseases that we don’t really have in America. There’s a hospital there and people line up and come in and I see them and take them to the operating room, things that I can help like club feet and tendon injuries, bone malformations,” Dr. Casey said. “There’s a lot of congenital disorders there. There’s a lot of limits on what we can do there because of the equipment we have and the follow up is difficult, meaning the patients live out in the mountains and it can be hard for them to come back and get any kind of therapy. There’s really no physical therapy there. So we have significant limits, but we try to focus on what we can improve not on the things we can’t improve.”

Even natural events such as childbirth take on added complexities.

“Women give birth in an open air foyer, so to say. There are wild animals that kind of run through the open air hospital. It’s not a place that most Americans would feel comfortable delivering their kids or having their surgery,” Dr. Casey said. “It’s a stark and striking contrast

from America. If you haven't been to a third world country, you should go because it makes you appreciate all that you have."

Dr. Casey said that anyone can help out in places of need such as Haiti.

"I think there are roles for lots of people. I get the question all the time, (they say) 'you're an orthopaedic surgeon, you can do something. What can I do?'" Dr. Casey said. "The short answer is there are people who come and go to orphanages and rock babies and help malnourished babies by feeding them. There are a lot of orphaned kids there from the earthquake a few years ago. Just really taking care of kids is an easy way for lay people to help."