

International Outreach Program St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

There are an estimated 289,000 cases of childhood cancer worldwide each year; and the St. Jude International Outreach Program is valiantly striving to address the needs of those countries who lack sufficient training, technology and organizational skills to effectively manage their own burden of cases. Key to the success of this program is St. Jude's commitment to helping people help themselves and each other; and the fact that many of the physicians in over a dozen countries in this program have visited or trained at St. Jude. These countries include Latin America, Africa, parts of the MidEast, Russia and China. Partner countries to the St. Jude International Outreach Program include Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Chile, Brazil, Venezuela, Honduras, Mexico, Ireland, Morocco, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Russia, and China.

Educational programs may be as straightforward as giving guidance on infection control in hospitals—which products to use, how to make effective disinfectants using inexpensive local products, and specific strategies for reducing the chance of an outbreak. Or they may include surgical operations transmitted over the Internet; or medical conferences on specific diseases. During one such conference, St. Jude physicians identified a child in South America who was a suitable candidate for a bone marrow transplant. Since the child's hospital did not have the resources to perform the operation, St. Jude brought the child to Memphis for the treatment.

The successes of the St. Jude International Outreach Program have been dramatic and include, among other achievements:

- Increasing the cure rate for childhood cancers in Recife, Brazil from 29% to 60% since initiating a partnership in 1994.
- Raising the probability of 4-year survival for El Salvadoran children with acute lymphoblastic leukemia from 10% to 60% during an 8-year collaboration
- Helping to establish the capability for bone marrow transplants in Santiago, Chile
- Training health care providers, developing protocol-based therapy, establishing diagnostic and molecular genetics laboratory and performing collaborative research in Shanghai

The work also continues in Honduras, where St. Jude has established a partnership at a clinic for the treatment of retinoblastoma, a tumor that can occur in one or both eyes, either blinding or killing young patients. While 95% of affected children survive this disease in the US—versus none a hundred years ago--less than 20% survive in the Honduran clinic, where the cancer is the fourth most common solid tumor. Locating the retinoblastoma program in Honduras will allow for this pilot program to be easily expanded to two other St. Jude partner countries, El Salvador and Guatemala—and eventually to countries throughout Central America.

A key element to the International Program is the Cure4Kids project. Originally established to provide advice and guidance to physicians in countries with limited resources, it now offers a comprehensive menu of educational and support services. Physicians from around the world can listen in real time to lectures, share Power Point slides with each other, and exchange advice on how best to treat patients in communities that have limited resources.

St. Jude works hard to ensure that the physicians affiliated with its International Outreach program can access these services. St. Jude has helped to provide affiliates with microphones, speakers and even pays for cable access when necessary. St. Jude physicians also shipped used computers to physicians in areas of limited resources. An important aspect of the St. Jude International Outreach is its physician-education ripple effect. Physicians pass on information they gain to other physicians in areas without sufficient resources access to the Internet or satellite services. The International Outreach program is ambitious, widely inclusive, and relentless in its pursuit of the dream of St. Jude's founder, Danny Thomas that "no child should die in the dawn of life." No child, anywhere in the world. For more information on St. Jude, see <http://www.stjude.org/international-outreach>