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News Release

USU Graduates Team to Save Critically Wounded Afghani Toddler

BETHESDA, Md. — A team of physician graduates from the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU) recently saved the life of a 3-year-old Afghani girl after she was severely injured in a bomb blast.

Four USU alumni: Air Force Col. (Dr.) Gary Arishita, Maj. (Dr.) Chetan Kharod, Lt. Col. (Dr.) Randy McCafferty, and Maj. (Dr.) Charles Reilly, who are also university faculty members currently serving in Afghanistan, treated the toddler after she sustained life threatening injuries from an explosion while allegedly being used as a human shield by members of the Taliban.

The little girl was immediately taken to a medical facility in Aslamabad, Afghanistan, and from there transferred to Bagram Air Base in critical condition. Dr. Arishita (USU SOM '87), a plastic surgeon serving as director of clinical surgical services at the Craig Joint Theater Hospital there, reviewed the case and admitted her to the hospital.

Dr. Kharod (USU SOM '96), an emergency physician, performed initial trauma resuscitation and promptly diagnosed massive head trauma involving brain hemorrhage. The girl also had a large bomb fragment lodged in her brain, and severe left eye trauma including a ruptured left eye with foreign bodies embedded inside the orbit.

After stabilization and assessment in the ER, the toddler was taken to the operating room where Dr. McCafferty (USU SOM '93), a neurosurgeon, placed an external ventricular drain into her brain to monitor and help control the elevated pressure inside her skull caused by her traumatic injury. Dr. McCafferty then transferred care of the patient to
Dr. Reilly (USU SOM '97), an ophthalmologist, who repaired the lacerated left globe of her eye and removed a large foreign body from her left orbit. After surgery, she was transferred to the intensive care unit.

The following day the pressure inside her skull proved difficult to control so Dr. McCafferty performed a life-saving bifrontal craniectomy, an extensive procedure to relieve the excess pressure. Despite the surgical intervention and intensive medical care available at the hospital, the child's prognosis was grim and she was not expected to survive. Incredibly, her condition improved and Dr. McCafferty was eventually able to place a shunt to relieve the pressure in her brain and perform a cranioplasty.

Learning to Care for Those in Harm's Way

Less than a month after sustaining her life-threatening brain injury, the little girl left the hospital, having regained much of the vision in the left eye and with only mild neurological symptoms.

USU faculty and alumni are often deployed and work together in military health facilities throughout the world employing what they have learned in their education and training and developing new skills and techniques to bring back to their classrooms in their roles as medical school faculty. They are the key people in the battlefield to bench to bedside (and then back to the battlefield) continuum of improving care of those wounded troops and civilians.

USU, located in Bethesda, Maryland, on the grounds of the National Naval Medical Center, educates health care professionals dedicated to career service in the Department of Defense and the United States Public Health Service. Students are active-duty uniformed officers in the Army, Navy, Air Force and Public Health Service who are being educated to deal with wartime casualties, disasters, emerging infectious diseases, and other public health emergencies. Of the university's more than 4,000 physician alumni, the vast majority serve on active duty and are supporting operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, offering their leadership and expertise.

For more information call the Office of External Affairs at (301) 295-1219.

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