Surgeon Speaks

Follow this and additional works at: http://jdc.jefferson.edu/jss

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Recommended Citation

Available at: http://jdc.jefferson.edu/jss/vol11/iss2/2

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Jefferson Digital Commons. The Jefferson Digital Commons is a service of Thomas Jefferson University’s Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). The Commons is a showcase for Jefferson books and journals, peer-reviewed scholarly publications, unique historical collections from the University archives, and teaching tools. The Jefferson Digital Commons allows researchers and interested readers anywhere in the world to learn about and keep up to date with Jefferson scholarship. This article has been accepted for inclusion in Jefferson Surgical Solutions by an authorized administrator of the Jefferson Digital Commons. For more information, please contact: JeffersonDigitalCommons@jefferson.edu.
Transplant surgeons Stephen Dunn, MD, and Warren Maley, MD, travel to Santa Cruz, Bolivia, several times a year to donate their services and train local surgeons at Clinica Incor. Photo: Meighan Maley, PharmD.

More than 20 years ago, Stephen P. Dunn, MD, FACS, Professor of Pediatric Surgery at Jefferson, encountered a young liver transplant patient who had traveled from his home in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, to St. Christopher’s Hospital for Children. After inquiring why the boy hadn’t been transplanted in his home country, Dr. Dunn learned that while surgeons in Santa Cruz had a fair amount of experience with kidney transplants, they were not able to perform liver transplants. In order to have these life-saving surgeries, patients in Santa Cruz needed the funds not only to pay for the operation but also to travel outside the country.

Dr. Dunn reached out to the surgeons in Santa Cruz and invited Dr. Maley to perform the transplant. When a liver becomes available, Dr. Dunn approaches Warren R. Maley, MD, Professor of Surgery and Director of Jefferson’s Live Donor Liver Transplant Program. Until then, Dr. Dunn had been handling all of the transplantation surgeries, operating on live donors as well as pediatric recipients. He asked Dr. Maley if he would be willing to assist with operating on the live donors in Santa Cruz. That first year, Dr. Maley made the trip four times.

Since then, Dr. Maley has begun assisting with adult liver transplants, as well, but only using deceased donors. Unlike pediatric cases, which can be planned in advance, there’s no advance notice for adult transplants. When a liver becomes available, Dr. Maley gets a call and starts the long trip—arriving the following morning to perform the transplant.

In 2012, Dr. Dunn approached Dr. Maley about the possibility of doing pediatric transplants. Since then, Dr. Maley has handled all of the transplantation surgeries, operating on live donors, as well as pediatric recipients. He asked Dr. Maley if he would be willing to assist with operating on the live donors in Santa Cruz. That first year, Dr. Maley made the trip four times. Since then, Dr. Maley has begun assisting with adult liver transplants, as well, but only using deceased donors. Unlike pediatric cases, which can be planned in advance, there’s no advance notice for adult transplants. When a liver becomes available, Dr. Maley gets a call and starts the long trip—arriving the following morning to perform the transplant.

“While we do the pediatric transplants, we usually stay three or four days to make sure things are headed in the right direction,” Dr. Maley explains. “Every time Dr. Dunn and I go back to Bolivia, we have the chance to see the adults and kids we’ve transplanted. They all come back to the clinic.”

Since pediatric transplants are often performed while the patients are babies, he doesn’t really “recognize” them when they come back to visit years later. However, he and Dr. Dunn thoroughly enjoy seeing them active and vibrant—running, playing and even flexing their muscles. Adult patients are equally grateful, with one serenading the surgeons with his accordion at a reunion dinner.

Dr. Maley notes that while Santa Cruz is home to some very wealthy families, most of its two million residents are very poor.

“There’s a large population of people who, if they get sick, can’t afford to go anywhere else,” he said. In fact, even with Dr. Dunn and Dr. Maley donating their services, transplant patients’ families must raise a significant amount of money to cover other costs. Many sell the family car or take on additional jobs to raise the funds. Dr. Dunn is actively working to find ways to help bring down those costs. And both surgeons are focused on increasing the self-sufficiency of the local surgeons.

“All of the effort we put into teaching the indigenous surgeons at Clinica Incor, we impart more expertise to the surgeons there,” he says. “I think before too long, they really can be self-sufficient. That would be tremendously rewarding—a great accomplishment for everyone on the team.”

Patients who undergo liver transplantation go from being very sick to reclaiming their lives. It’s a rapid and rewarding transformation. The notion that there are still places in the world where this surgery isn’t available is a problem. No one should die of liver disease because of lack of funding.

The city of Santa Cruz has surgeons who operate every day. They want to learn how to do liver transplants, but there wasn’t anyone to teach them. It’s an honor to work with them when they come back to visit.

While our work in Bolivia may not be solving the problem globally, it is making a difference for the physicians and patients there. As surgeons, we don’t often think about our skills not being readily available in other countries. Based on our experiences in Santa Cruz, we encourage other surgeons to be open to volunteer opportunities.

Warren R. Maley, MD
Professor of Surgery
Director, Live Donor Liver Transplant Program
Sidney Kimmel Medical College at Thomas Jefferson University

Stephen P. Dunn, MD, FACS
Professor of Surgery
Chief, Division of Pediatric Solid Organ Transplantation
Nemours/Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children

Published by Jefferson Digital Commons, 2016

Surgical Solutions

Stephen Dunn and Warren Maley Volunteer Transplantation Services, Expertise in Bolivia

In this issue

Clinical Integration
Smoking Cessation, Counseling & Therapy Program Helps Patients Kick the Habit – Page 2

Changing Lives Through Research
Allie Willis Leads Study Exploring Demographics, Diagnoses, and Outcomes of Subternal Goiters – Page 3

On the Job
Velvet Cain – Page 3

Those Who Give
For Cygan Clan, Raising Funds Honors Sister and Strengthens Family Ties – Page 4

Surgeon Speaks

Helps Patients Kick the Habit – Page 2

For Cygan Clan, Raising Funds Honors Sister and Strengthens Family Ties – Page 4