Columbia Medical Students Pitch In During First Days of World Trade Center Tragedy

BY JO KADLECEK

Eric David was finishing his rounds in the Intensive Care Unit at Cooper Union’s Bassett Hospital when he first learned of the World Trade Center attack. The fourth-year Columbia medical student was on post-call from the night before and hadn’t gotten much sleep when the hospital was contacted for volunteers. He signed up and waited.

By 5 p.m., his attending physician suggested David would “give much more intense care down there than here” and told him to take as much time as he needed. He borrowed a friend’s car as well as a new car battery, and had to drive through 10 police checkpoints before he finally made it to Presbyterian Hospital and, eventually, Chelsea Pier to volunteer. More waits.

But early Wednesday morning, David piled into the back of a police van with five officers to Ground Zero in downtown Manhattan. When he arrived at the first triage site, a relatively quiet Stuyvesant High School—David ran into two classmates, Peter Jeff Nicholls and Esmond Vitt, who had come hours before. The three students—along with at least 11 other medical students from the College of Physicians and Surgeons (CP&S) went to work.

First they assisted doctors and nurses who were treating injured rescue workers. After a 24-hour station and an eye wash station were set up, the classmates ran across the street to the 72nd EMA office, collected cases of respirator masks, helmets and goggles, and headed toward the unimaginable disaster center to hand out the safety gear in hopes of preventing more injuries. They passed charred human remains and smashed emergency vehicles that had arrived before the towers collaged into the sky.

David then spent most of the day keeping up with the range of activities and supplies between Stuyvesant, the American Express Building and 1 Liberty Plaza. He was on call, making sure each had saline for eyewashes, albuterol and atrovent for respiratory treatments, and basic first aid supplies and care—Nicholls, Vitt and other fourth-year students—Katerina Christopoulos, Jeremy Keenan, Rebecca Bauer, Alison Sullivan, Kelly Tector and David Spinks—were assigned to medical teams that worked around the clock dispatching aid, trading supplies, carrying out the offering support. For the next three days, the Columbia medical students—Dr. Kenneth Lewis, John Lantis, as well as Columbia residents J Mocco and Fred Nicholson, along with Singh and his medical students at the crisis center, the number of volunteers who did come forward was overwhelming. “We as physicians felt frustrated because we as we were able to mobilize people throughout the week and over the weekend when we updated and support,” Lewis said.

How will those future physicians who worked at Ground Zero be affected by their direct involvement with such horror? “It’s difficult to gauge, but I think it will be a lifetime,” Liu said.

But the camaraderie I developed with colleagues and with patients will last. “When I look back to the attack, it was seeking any personal glory from this. It was a united effort and we’ll all be affected forever.”

Columbia Faculty Explore Possible Future of American Defense and Foreign Policy

BY JAMES DEVITT

The United States response to the Sept. 11 attacks has turned the nation’s relationships with other countries into a “kaleidoscope,” according to Peter Jeff Nicholls, a professor of International and Public Affairs (SIPA).

“Those are still there, but they are re-arranged and look different,” said Sick, speaking at a roundtable sponsored by SIPA’s Harriman Institute. “Today, our interests are defending the security of the U.S. That changes how we look at our friends and our enemies. If the U.S. is fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan it needs allies. We are fighting for the war in Iraq. We need a friend.”

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“American military and diplomatic activity in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks,” said SIPA’s institutes and research centers have been sponsoring a range of forums to address issues surrounding the Sept. 11 attacks.

“The near-term issue is how to bolster military activity that appears significant,” said Bett, who heads SIPA’s Institute of War and Peace Studies. “The new problem is finding targets and fixing them long enough for strike forces to arrive.”

Acknowledging the challenge of launching a successful military operation in Afghanistan, Ziss noted that the United States faces fewer obstacles than did the Soviet Union when the Soviets invaded the country in 1979. The Soviet Union withdrew in 1989 after failing to defeat Afghan rebels.

Unlike the Soviets, the United States has no plans for a large-scale military invasion designed to control Afghanistan’s political leadership, noted Ziss, currently a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. She added that the Taliban does not have the level of international support the Afghan rebels received.

However, Ziss added that the Taliban still hold weapons received from the United States during the 1980’s, when it was battling the Soviets. These include 50 to 200 Stinger missiles, which are effective in shooting down low-flying aircraft such as helicopters. “The Taliban still hold weapons received from the United States during the 1980’s, when it was battling the Soviets. These include 50 to 200 Stinger missiles, which are effective in shooting down low-flying aircraft such as helicopters. Heli-copters, Ziss said, will be necessary in transporting U.S. Special Forces into Afghanistan.

Legovald, a specialist on the international relations of the post-Soviet region, thought the attacks could have new diplomatic relations between the United States and Russia.

“Without terrorism it could be the basis for a new relationship with Russia, much like WWII did, because the main problem is finding different roles between the two nations,” he said.

Legovald added that Russia was motivated to assist the United States in part, because the links between Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda—a terrorist organization also believed to be behind the Sept. 11 attacks—and terrorist groups operating in Chechnya.

Russia is currently battling rebels in the breakaway region. “In Chechnya, Russia is currently battling rebels in the breakaway region,” said Legovald.

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