



Doctor On A Mission:
Stephen McCollam

2010 HEALTHCARE HEROES

By Ed Lightsey

HEROES

Three physicians and a pharmacist-turned-outreach-specialist use their skills at home and in troubled distant countries

THIS YEAR'S SEARCH FOR *GEORGIA TREND'S* HEALTHCARE HEROES TOOK US TO Columbus, Augusta and Thomasville as well as Atlanta. We found individuals who are joining their skills and their passion – one traveling regularly to Haiti to provide medical and surgical care, one working to combat surgical wound infections and two focusing on the special needs of rural areas in Georgia. Meet them all in the following pages.

STEPHEN MCCOLLAM, M.D.
PEACHTREE ORTHOPEDIC CLINIC
ATLANTA

When orthopedic surgeon Dr. Steve McCollam arrived in Haiti eight days after last January's earthquake, he walked across an otherworldly landscape of buildings turned to rubble, the headstones for thousands of people buried below. At his destination, Hôpital Albert Schweitzer Haiti in Deschepelles, located 70 miles outside of Port-au-Prince, McCollam found indescribable pain and suffering in numbers the medical facility could not hold.

"There was nearly complete and total chaos," recalls McCollam, part of a group of seven physicians from Atlanta's Peachtree Orthopedic Clinic (POC) on a Samaritan mission to repair the torn and shattered bodies of those who could be saved. Many would need no such attention.

"People were dying every day of infections because they had run out of antibiotics, and they had run out of all pain medicines. The hos-



PEACHTREE ORTHOPEDIC CLINIC

Relief Efforts: At left, Dr. McCollam ready for surgery in Haiti; below, preparing for a recent trip to Haiti are, from left, Drs. Marcel Gilli and Lee Kelley; nurse Rick Hodge, Drs. John David Mullins and McCollam and nurse Deborah Shreer.



PEDMONT HOSPITAL

pital normally can hold 80 patients, and when we got there the best estimates were that there were 500 patients in and around the hospital, out in the courtyards, and the halls were lined on both sides with beds. You could barely get through." But the POC doctors could offer some immediate aid, thanks to a little foresight and the compassionate generosity of their Atlanta neighbors.

"Fortunately, we found out about [conditions there] two days before we left," McCollam says. "We went to Piedmont and WellStar hospitals and they were able to give us thousands of doses of antibiotics and hundreds, if not thousands, of doses of narcotics to give to the people quickly to give them some kind of merciful pain relief."

This is the 20th year McCollam has gone to Haiti as a volunteer physician, paying his own expenses, and the trips have become a part of the Peachtree Orthopedic Clinic culture, dating back to 1956. "I'd say more than half the doctors in our practice [of 28 physicians] have gone to Haiti," McCollam says. "A number of those who haven't done it want to do it. It's a very special glue that bonds us together."

POC doctors make two or three trips a year to care for patients in Haiti, one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere. The Peachtree Clinic is also responsible for shipping medical supplies to the country, using donations from their Georgia vendors, a charitable practice that is being formalized through the formation of the Peachtree Orthopedic Clinic Foundation. "The response has been tremendous," McCollam says. "We've had donations of well over \$10,000 to the foundation just for charitable work in Haiti. Now if we have a medical student or a nurse who wants to come with us and can't afford it, we can buy a plane ticket to get them down there."

POC's relationship with Haiti began in the early 1950s when the clinic's founder, Dr. Jim Funk, received a letter from a nun in Haiti asking for discarded or unused braces for her orphanage there. Funk's curiosity led to a first visit, followed by annual trips by the clinic's founder that continue to the present.

"The physicians lose income when out of the office, but there are other compensations," McCollam says. "I tell you, as hard as it is and as exhausted as I am when I come back, I have this unique feeling of being cleansed."

By mid-summer, McCollam was making plans for another trip to Haiti in the fall. "For doctors, the reason that attracted them to go into medicine is because they wanted to help people, pure and simple," he says.



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