

SIGN Fracture Care International wins Patents for Humanity Award



Washington Global Health Alliance

APRIL 16, 2013

SIGN Fracture Care International, a WGHA member and Washington Global Health Fund grantee, received the Patents for Humanity Award at a ceremony held in Washington, D.C. on April 11, 2013. The award is given to patented technologies used to provide humanitarian aid to people in impoverished areas.

The award was accepted by Maryland based orthopedic surgeon Dr. Jessica Hirschhorn. Hirschhorn has worked with SIGN since 2009 when she raised money to establish a SIGN program in Halibet Hospital located in the East African country of Eritrea.

SIGN Fracture Care is a nonprofit organization founded in 1999 by Tri-Cities orthopedic surgeon Dr. Lewis G. Zirkle. His mission was to develop an Intramedullary nail (IM nail) System that surgeons working in hospitals in developing countries, with few resources, could use efficiently with minimal recovery time for patients. The SIGN IM nail is a stainless steel rod designed to be inserted into a tibia bone (lower leg), femur (thigh bone) or humerus (upper arm bone). Once inserted, the nail holds the fractured bone in place to help accelerate healing. Manufactured in the home offices located in Richland, Wash., the IM nails are provided to SIGN trained surgeons worldwide for little or no cost. Implants produced at the facility currently help 20,000 patients per year. Former PNNL Patent Attorney Steve May was instrumental in the submission and awarding of the patent for the SIGN IM Nail System.

SIGN trained doctors have performed more than 111,000 surgeries in 53 countries. This fall SIGN will host the 12th annual international orthopedic conference in the use of the IM nail to doctors from around the world. This year 150 surgeons are expected to attend.

“Patients will benefit most where there is a sustainable supply of relevant orthopaedic implants that is combined with training and education,” said Dr. Zirkle.

Zirkle and a team of volunteer doctors travel extensively teaching surgeons how to perform the implant procedure. The surgery takes between one and three hours followed by a brief hospital stay. “In poor countries where the average pay is \$2 a day any time away from their work can be financially devastating,” said SIGN CEO Jeanne Dillner. “The focus of SIGN is to partner with the local surgeons to provide surgery that will speed healing for the patient.”

Doctors trained to use the SIGN system in developing nations are instructed to share their knowledge with colleagues. “Once doctors have been trained in the use of the SIGN IM nail we continue to supply the implants as they report their cases on the surgical database” said Dr. Zirkle. “The SIGN surgeons are the best trauma surgeons in the world. They have used the SIGN IM Nail System in innovative ways

resulting in thousands of patients returning to active and productive lives.”

View the original article at

<http://www.wghalliance.org/Media/WGHAAnnouncements/WGHANewsDetail/tabid/148/ArticleId/224/SIGN-Fracture-Care-International-wins-Patents-for-Humanity-Award.aspx>