

Molokai surgeon on historic eye care mission

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In what has already been called "the largest surgical training program in Asia," a team of 30 leading eye specialists from four countries traveled to Vietnam to devote a week in June to training local eye surgeons in modern eye care.

John M. Corboy, M.D., of Kaunakakai, led the international faculty of the Imperial City Eye Meeting II, held in Hue City, June 2-6, to lecture and demonstrate advanced eye surgical techniques to the Vietnamese ophthalmologists.



"John M. Corboy, M.D., of Kaunakakai, examines a boy's eyes as part of a training program in Vietnam for local eye surgeons."

The Congress Hall of the Huong Giang Hotel was packed all week with 326 eager Vietnamese eye surgeons from Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), Hanoi,

Danang, and other parts of the country to hear Dr. Corboy and eye care leaders from the U.S., Canada, Germany and the United Kingdom.

The program featured modern treatment of cataracts and intraocular lenses, as well as laser, corneal, retinal and ocular reconstructive surgery and glaucoma. In addition to the eye surgeons, health ministers, eye society leaders, and government officials came to evaluate the meeting first hand.

Dr. Corboy and his fellow faculty members traveled to Vietnam at their own expense to donate their time in lecture and laboratory training sessions. "We are really doing this for the patients of our Vietnamese colleagues," said Corboy. "They are the ones who benefit from the enhanced skills we impart to their surgeons."

Corboy's non-profit Hawaiian Eye Foundation, based in Honolulu, sponsored the eye meeting. The charitable foundation has conducted humanitarian eye care missions in the Pacific for 25 years, particularly in Tonga and Fiji.

"The Vietnamese eye doctors are very smart and eager," said Corboy, but because of a lack of equipment and instructors, they are practicing at a level of several decades ago. By bringing modern lasers, surgical machines, and diagnostic equipment, we can provide training which is not available in their country."

The Hue Central Hospital chose the Hawaiian Eye Foundation because of the foundation's expertise in managing large-scale medical teaching conferences. The foundation has conducted the Royal Hawaiian Eye Meeting, an annual convention of up to 1,000 doctors, nurses and technicians, for the past 30 years. Corboy's foundation then recruited the international faculty and 15 U.S. and Asian equipment, instrument, and pharmaceutical companies, to create the most effective group-learning conditions in lecture hall and eye surgery labs.

"Working in a foreign language under a socialist government provided some fascinating challenges," said Corboy. "We are particularly indebted to our team of specialists who so generously donate their time, money, and skills to help others," said Corboy. "Without strong faculty support, we could never have created this historic event."

In addition to the daily lectures, the Vietnamese eye surgeons received one-on-one individualized surgical instruction by Dr. Corboy and the faculty volunteers.

Operating under powerful microscopes on pigs' eyes, the team guided trainees through the latest techniques and instrumentation.

The first Imperial City Eye Meeting (ICEM) was held in Hue City in May of 2006, and was so successful that the Vietnamese insisted on a return training program this June. The ICEM II this year experienced a 40 percent increase in participation, indicating the popularity and value to the Vietnamese surgeons. "We were pleasantly surprised to realize that a majority of the eye surgeons in the country attended our conference," said Dr. Corboy.

"This teaching experience was very gratifying, to create such a valuable training program," said Corboy. "When we realized that our team's efforts will change the future of eye care for an entire country, it is pretty amazing. I am honored to have led this remarkable international faculty," Corboy said, "and I'm humbled and grateful for this opportunity to make such a difference in people's lives. I've already agreed to commit our foundation to return in 2010."

For more information, or to make a tax-deductible contribution to further the Foundation's charitable eye care programs, contact hwneyefoundation@aol.com.