

OC REGISTER FRONTPAGE

Hands-on healing

A surgeon from Iraq is studying techniques in O.C. to help him heal the wounds of war back home.



STEADY HANDS: Iraq's Dr. Avadis Muradian, center, assists Dr. Robert Gorab at St. Joseph Hospital. The headgear is used in joint surgery to prevent infection.

A surgeon from war-torn Iraq is in Orange County this month on a mission of learning and healing.

Dr. Avadis Muradian, an orthopedist from Basra who spends much of his time trying to repair the human carnage of war, is observing local surgeons as they work and picking up new techniques.

His trip, including a \$1,700 plane ticket and arrangements to stay with families in Southern California, is sponsored by a local relief agency and an orthopedic institute started by Orange County doctors. **NEWS 4**

"I hope my country will be (like America) after a few years. Nothing is impossible."

DR. AVADIS MURADIAN
IRAQI SURGEON WHO'S ON A MISSION TO LEARN NEW SKILLS



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A LITTLE REST: Muradian takes a break after a long day of surgery.

Aiming to heal wounds of war

Surgeon from Iraq is exposed to new techniques in O.C. on a trip sponsored by relief agency.

By COURTNEY PERKES
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

ORANGE • With a metal instrument, Dr. Avadis Muradian holds open the gaping pink flesh of a knee, where a sophisticated artificial joint will allow a long-distance cyclist to ride his bike again.

The operating room at St. Joseph Hospital is a world away from Muradian's hospital in Basra, Iraq, where he treats children maimed after grenades explode in their hands.

And unlike what he saw during the knee-replacement surgery last week, Muradian can't send his patients home with greater mobility because prosthetic fingers and hands aren't available.

The 50-year-old surgeon is visiting Orange County and Los Angeles for three weeks to see the latest in orthopedic medicine, which brings him hope for what Iraq may someday offer.

Watching other doctors here, he says, will help him at home, where he treats overwhelming needs with limited supplies.

On this afternoon, the jet-lagged, affable doctor is amazed by his first 48 hours outside the Middle East. In medical school, he studied out of American textbooks. But he said nothing rivals standing shoulder-to-shoulder with



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MASKED MAN: Dr. Avadis Muradian listens to orthopedic surgeon Dr. Robert Gorab through his surgical helmet at St. Joseph Hospital. He plans to use his skills to help war-wounded children.

American surgeon Dr. Robert Gorab.

"I'm ashamed to ask what is this equipment," Muradian says after watching four surgeries. "It's very advanced. He did an operation today with the aid of a computer."

From the operating room, he steps into the doctors lounge, where his American counterparts are chatting or working on computers. In the background, Fox News plays footage of the day's carnage in Iraq.

Muradian prepares a cup of hot tea and sits down to relax. He plans to visit relatives he's never met who live in Los Angeles. He wants to see Hollywood: "If I can see Tom Cruise, Al Pacino and DeNiro, I'll be

very grateful."

But mostly he's thinking about ways to bring more healing to his broken country. He also would like to show Americans an Iraqi face outside the news of war. As he has met patients, he notes their surprise when they hear where he's from.

"We are not bad people," Muradian said. "We really are not people that like killing. I want to see a peaceful Iraq - no violence, more development, more reconstruction, more hospitals. I want every people, every country to respect Iraqis."

Muradian works at Basra General Hospital, built by the British in the 1920s. Iraqi police guard the entrance. There

are separate wards for men and women. Without an insurance system, the government pays doctors' salaries.

In the early days of the war, Muradian performed all kinds of emergency surgeries, many outside his specialty. He's always on call, though he's never summoned during the middle of the night. Nobody, he says, goes out at night.

He remembers after the war started, numerous groups offered aid to his hospital. In the end, none of the offers panned out except for a fresh coat of paint for the building.

"We saw nothing," Muradian said. "We don't want paint. We want equipment. We need instruments for fractures, prosthesis."

He must be creative to make use of his primitive equipment. He has made some simple tools himself - a contrast to Dr. Gorab, who consults with medical-device companies to help design new products.

"If you have no glass to drink water, you use your hand," Muradian said.

Muradian, whose grandparents moved to Iraq from Armenia, said he sees another side of Iraq, beyond the casualties and violence. As a Christian, he said, he lives in harmony with Shiite and Sunni Muslims. As a doctor or *tabib*, as he's called in Arabic, he's treated with respect.

His trip is paid for by the nonprofit Buena Park-based Global Operations and Development and a group of surgeons from the Orthopaedic Education and Research Institute of Southern California. As part of an ongoing exchange, more Iraqi doctors will visit in February.

Juliana Ditty, executive vice president of Global Operations, arranged for Muradian to stay with local families. Her group has sent 18 40-foot containers of medical supplies to Iraqi hospitals.

Gorab said plans are in the works to send over supplies that Muradian can use.

"There's all kinds of equipment in hospitals across the country that never gets used. It's sitting in basements," said Dr. Vance Gardner of the education and research institute. "They're thirsty for it."

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