

# Wright State's Emergency Medicine Department Sends Humanitarian Mission to Mozambique

By Mark Willis

Wright State's Department of Emergency Medicine celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. In two decades the department has played a national and international role in developing emergency medicine as an academic discipline, a leadership role reflected in the series of events planned to mark its anniversary. But the most fitting observance of the department's origins may be its emergency response to an unplanned event, a catastrophic natural disaster half a world away.

## A Discipline Evolves

In 1980 Wright State became the nation's fifth medical school to establish a full-scale academic department in emergency medicine. Today 61 U.S. medical schools have EM departments. In the discipline's early years, EM departments were started mainly by community-based medical schools such as Wright State in direct response to community needs. The balance shifted in the 1990s as university-based medical centers at Johns Hopkins, the University of Michigan, and, most recently, Indiana University established departments.

"At one time the hospital emergency room was known as 'the pit,' recalls Glenn C.

Hamilton, M.D., Wright State's EM chair. "Traditional academic medical centers took a while to come around, but now they see the value in training emergency medicine specialists."

"Our greatest accomplishment in Dayton over these 20 years has been to supply trained EM specialists to each of the hospitals in the city and the surrounding area. Almost 40% of our graduates have chosen to stay nearby. This is a very positive statement about the level of emerging care in the region and the relationships we have with our constituents."

Wright State's EM department is based at Kettering Medical Center. Its integrated residency training program staffs emergency departments there and at six other Wright State-affiliated hospitals: Children's Medical Center, Franciscan Medical Center, Good Samaritan Hospital, Greene Memorial Hospital, Miami Valley Hospital, and the USAF Medical Center at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.

The department's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary events began in April with a joint meeting with the Dayton Surgical Society. In May Wright State hosted the 10<sup>th</sup> annual Ohio/Midwest Regional Emergency Medicine Research Symposium. In June the department brought Peter Rosen, M.D., to

Dayton. Professor and chair of emergency medicine at the University of California at San Diego, Dr. Rosen is one of the discipline's founders and editor-in-chief of its major textbook, *Emergency Medicine: Concepts and Clinical Practice*. Known simply as *Rosen's*, the three-volume text is headed for its fifth edition; Dr. Hamilton is one of its editors.

## Mission to Mozambique

After catastrophic floods drowned thousands and left nearly half a million others homeless in Mozambique, Roger Pacholka, M.D., got the call. Food, medical supplies, and volunteer doctors were needed urgently in the southeast African nation, one of the world's poorest and least prepared for natural disaster.

A 1985 graduate of Wright State University School of Medicine, Dr. Pacholka trained in Wright State's EM residency and serves on the department's voluntary faculty today. He travels regularly to southern Africa as a medical missionary. Last year he and his wife Katy, a nurse, established the nonprofit missionary organization In His Name Ministries to support volunteer medical services in Africa and Central America.

“Even on a good day, the people of Mozambique have a very difficult time,” Dr. Pacholka says. “When the floods crested, a third of the nation was underwater. It was harvest time, and most of the crops were destroyed. There was tremendous suffering.”

Dr. Pacholka called his chair, Dr. Hamilton. Within 24 hours, half of Wright State’s 36 emergency medicine residents had volunteered to go to Africa. Three different teams — eight residents and two clinical faculty — shuttled to Mozambique in April and May. The emergency response was a department-wide effort, according to Dr. Hamilton; residents who did not make the trip covered their colleagues’ shifts at Dayton-area hospitals.

“We were on our way within a week,” says Dr. Pacholka. “I know of no other residency program in the country that has mobilized an effort like that.”

Working from a base in Chibuto, a city comparable in size to Dayton before flooding submerged half of it, the Wright State doctors boarded a helicopter every morning to fly to remote sites in the countryside. They set up makeshift clinics in churches or under shade trees in the open air. When they worked singly, each examined 60-150 patients a day. When they worked in three-doctor teams, they treated 300 a day while another 300 waited in line. At the end of the day, only the sickest patient could be flown out to the hospital in Chibuto.

The doctors encountered rampant malaria, diarrhea, bronchitis, conjunctivitis, and acute malnutrition. When the rains finally stopped, safe drinking water became a scarcity. Cholera and typhoid loomed as widespread threats. To make matters worse, thousands of land mines, the consequence of two decades of civil war in Mozambique, had been displaced by the floods.

“In emergency medicine, you have to know a little bit about everything,” Dr. Pacholka says. “Emergency physicians are well suited for this type of disaster situation. They can carry most of the equipment they need in a backpack. They can fly in and open up shop under a tree. You can’t order lab tests or X-rays in conditions like that. You have to rely strictly on your own judgment, and that makes for a very good doctor.”

“The residents came back from Mozambique tired yet invigorated,” Dr. Hamilton says. “A number of them will return to Africa, and others will follow. They’re willing to make sacrifices to meet that need. It says a lot about the caliber of individuals we have as residents and faculty. We’re very proud of them.”

Wright State’s Mozambique teams included residents Brian Loveridge, M.D., John Henner, D.O., Frank Lee, D.O., Brian Delmonaco, M.D., Steve Gilmore, M.D., Jeff Love, M.D., Todd Davis, M.D., and Nabil Boutros, M.D.; and clinical faculty Roger Pacholka, M.D., and Mark A. Eilers, M.D.