

MEDICAL MISSION BOXES Provide Hand-Carried Relief

For some people, doing more, helping more, extending themselves, becomes a way of life — just so that others could live better. And for those people — people like Dr. Craig Sinkinson, of McCall, Idaho, and lately also of Santa Cruz La Laguna, Guatemala — Bristol-Myers Squibb has found a way to help. Working with Direct Relief International (DRI), the company has created a new program that provides boxes filled with medicines to individual physicians who can hand-carry them on mission trips, often to the poorest and remotest of villages.

Part of a targeted company product donations program that in 2004 contributed nearly \$50 million (at wholesale value) in medicines and other products to people in need in the developing world for disaster and mission relief and to help support a variety of health care programs, the Medical Mission Box program began in June 2004. It was specifically *not* designed for disaster relief or other large-scale efforts, but for the individual health care worker who wants to make a difference. The boxes, which can be taken directly on airplanes by the physicians, often along with their personal luggage, are valued at around \$20,000 (at wholesale) in donated medicines and contain a variety of Bristol-Myers Squibb antibiotics, antifungals and pain relievers.

As for Sinkinson, he first decided back in the 1970s that he wanted to devote his skills in emergency and family medicine to help underserved Spanish-speaking people in the U.S. More recently, after attending a conference in Guatemala on medical issues in Latin America, he learned about the isolated rural town of Santa Cruz La Laguna that has virtually no access to health care and is home to a predominantly indigenous Mayan community of about 1,600. He was also told of a building in the town that seemed perfect for a clinic. He now spends about two-thirds of every year there, doing whatever he can to help.

“The medicines Bristol-Myers Squibb provided through the Medical Mission Boxes with drugs like *Cefzil*, *Tequin*, *Westcort* and *Excedrin* were great and extremely helpful,” he says. “I have provided care to more than 190 people and dealt with infectious diseases, dermatological disorders, inflammation and mild pain, using these medicines. It’s care that wouldn’t have been possible otherwise.”

Sinkinson continues, “I came to a point in my life when I wanted to do something more for others. I was in my 50s, financially stable and my kids were grown. I have my knowledge base, but I didn’t have the tools I needed to provide care. This Medical Mission Box program gave me a starting point. Now other organizations, including Direct Relief International, are also providing larger shipments of medicines, and our clinic is up and running.”

Adds Damon Taugher, the DRI program officer who has been working with the company on the program, processing the boxes and getting them to physicians: “This program grew out of the recognition that traveling volunteer physicians collectively provide extensive health services in developing countries. Medical missions typically need medicines, but in volumes that can be carried with the team. Previously, we had no structured program, and inefficiencies prevented us from supporting many of these important missions and likely caused physicians to spend substantial amounts of their valuable time trying to compile supplies. Now, the Medical Mission Box program allows us to support every eligible physician. We have provided 85 boxes, each one specifically prepared to support different physicians on their trips. The cost of administering the program is low, and physicians generally apply through an online form on our website. It’s been a fantastic partnership with Bristol-Myers Squibb. These boxes allow physicians like Dr. Sinkinson to care for people who need treatment, and it is an honor to be able to help.”