

## Doctor honoured for commitment to care abroad

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Photo MIKE APORIUS / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

FERDINAND Pauls still remembers the first time he removed part of a patient's stomach.

It was the early 1960s and Pauls, a fresh medical graduate from the University of Manitoba, wasn't sure how to do the surgery.

Since he was working in the Congo with little surgical equipment, Pauls decided to consult his medical textbook for answers and start cutting.

"Not much training in Canada prepared me for working over there," he said, brushing off any notion he was at all nervous.

"You look up the procedure in the books and you do it."

Pauls' six-year stint in the Congo laid the foundation for his commitment to improving medical facilities and programs in developing countries that has spanned nearly five decades.

He has since worked in Kosovo, Thailand, India, Panama, Indonesia and the Philippines, and continues to push to reduce maternal death rates and upgrade hospitals in the Congo and other parts of the world.

On May 9, Pauls will receive the Manitoba Medical Association's Dr. Jack Armstrong Humanitarian Award, for his contributions abroad.

Although Pauls said the award is an honour, he is still more concerned with the 600,000 women and four million newborns who die unnecessarily during childbirth every year.

"(Sometimes) they need a caesarean section and no one can do a caesarean section," he said.

"Our responsibility is to help."

Pauls first discovered the problems women in developing countries have in labour after he specialized in obstetrics in 1970.

In Canada, six women per 100,000 die in childbirth. But in places like Afghanistan, Pauls said the number is as high as 1,100 deaths per 100,000 people.

Pauls said the death rates are largely due to cultures that don't place a high value on women, delays in getting to the hospital and little or no access to facilities and specialists who can perform emergency C-sections. Even Pauls, who knew how to perform safe C-sections in Canadian hospitals, had to improvise at times. After reading an article in *Time* magazine, Pauls began using symphysiotomy -- the practice of cutting cartilage between the pubic bones -- to get the baby out in a labour emergency.

Pauls concluded most deaths could be avoided altogether if doctors and midwives had the proper skills to deliver a baby -- a cause he is still championing today.

Pauls spends most of his time working on the cause with the Alarm International Program of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada that operates medical training programs in 25 countries.

He currently acts as a liaison between Canada and Kosovo, in addition to acting as the director of medical services for the South Eastman Regional Health Authority in Manitoba and president of the Mennonite Mission Health Association.

Despite his efforts, he said the biggest challenge is getting people to make long-term commitments instead of only responding to short-term disaster relief efforts.

His next big project will be working to supply medical instruments and expertise to deal with the thousands of women who have been raped in eastern Congo.

"The need is there and it's a question of co-ordinating," Pauls said. "It's a longer term thing that needs to be done."