

Love of books helps doctors overseas

By [Joanne Fox](#) | Posted: Monday, February 02, 2009



Steve Liebetrau of St. Luke's Regional Medical Center holds a box of books that were sent overseas as part of Operation Medical Libraries. (Staff photo by [Tim Hynds](#))

The efforts of one Siouxlander are paying off for doctors thousands of miles away.

Steve Liebetrau, physician recruiter at St. Luke's Regional Medical Center, has been collecting medical textbooks since late last year to send to doctors in Iraq and Afghanistan, both countries in which medical resources are in limited supply.

The project, called Operation Medical Libraries, was started at UCLA and has American universities and hospitals collaborating with the U.S. military to provide medical and nursing textbooks for medical students, nurses and physicians in countries of need. Liebetrau came across the organization on the Internet and was intrigued.

"I liked what I saw at the Web site," he explained. "And I'm a lover of books and my dad is a veteran. It just seemed like something I could do."

Liebetrau continued to read about the organization, which was conceived after the UCLA Medical Alumni Association's Books Without Borders received an e-mail from an alum and Army officer regarding the lack of medical materials for Iraqi physicians and medical students. That request prompted the UCLA organization to expand its donations and initiate the Operation Medical Libraries project.

The challenge for Iraqi doctors and medical students face is the lack of electricity, which results in slow access and limited availability to the Internet, where much current information is stored. Consequently, these health care

professionals have to rely heavily on medical textbooks.

The U.S. military's role in this effort is to work with the medical universities, hospitals, and physicians to improve the quality of medical education by distributing the donated textbooks, something that appealed to Liebetrau.

"I liked the idea of helping our own troops out in the manner and that the books would be donated right to them for distribution," he said.

Liebetrau ran the idea by St. Luke's administration and its response was, "By all means." A letter was sent out to all staff physicians about the program and encouraging the donation of textbooks.

"I think word went out on Halloween," he reflected. "A week later, I was shipping five boxes of books overseas. A second round of boxes went out about Thanksgiving."

The shipment boxes have particular requirements. Boxes need to way about 25 pounds and are sent through the U.S. Army Post Office (APO) and are calculated at a domestic rate. The most economical rate is just less than \$50, which St. Luke's is "gracious enough to pay for," Liebetrau said.

Liebetrau said the response has been beyond what he anticipated from the medical community. He's also heard from the recipients on the other side of the world.

"I've heard back from three different companies who've received the books," he said. "They were most appreciative and asked me to extend their best wishes to anyone who donated to this cause."

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