

REMEMBER PAKISTANI SUFFERING, DOCTOR URGES

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Byline: SUSAN WILLIAMS, Staff Writer

As the year draws to a close, 2005 may be remembered for the large number of natural disasters that brought on human suffering.

Dr. Abdul R. Piracha wants to make sure no one forgets the people still suffering from the earthquake that hit Pakistan Oct. 8.

Piracha, originally from Pakistan, is a cardiologist who has lived in Princeton since 1972. He practices at Princeton Community Hospital.

He is also the president-elect of the Association of Physicians of Pakistani Descent of North America, an organization based in Chicago.

Piracha visited his home country Oct. 18, less than two weeks after the earthquake.

“You cannot get a picture of it in your mind unless you see it,” he said of the widespread destruction.

He visited the town of Balakot, once home to 30,000 people. “There was not a single house or business that was not damaged,” he said. They estimate that 13,000 people died in that town alone.

To date, 80,000 people across the country have died from the earthquake, but he fears that number will climb to 100,000.

But even that huge number could grow bigger if people succumb to infections, diseases and the effects of the coming winter.

“Three million people have been displaced,” he said. They lost their homes and jobs. He also worries about the huge numbers of people who suffered disabilities — like a broken leg or a lost limb — from the earthquake.

So he flew home as soon as he could to establish a base where other doctors can come in rotations to help as much as they can.

“I went to do the groundwork,” he said.

Now when supplies and volunteers come in, they will have a place to work.

His association has raised \$1.2 million in cash and another

\$12 million to \$15 million in donations of medicines, supplies and equipment. The doctors are, in turn, asking their hospitals to donate pieces like X-ray machines, and the hospitals are donating them, he said.

Doctors will volunteer to go to Pakistan in rotations of two weeks at a time.

He also said he hopes people understand that Pakistan has been an ally of the United States since Pakistan formed in 1947. He said some Americans can remember that the famous U-2 spy plane was launched from Pakistan.

Pakistan is also a current ally with the United States in its fight against terrorism. Pakistanis have suffered the second highest number of deaths from terrorists of any country in the world, he said.

In recent days, Piracha has traveled to Boston, Chicago, New York and Washington in his efforts to talk to people about the great need Pakistan faces. In Washington, he spoke to staff members from both W.Va. senators' offices, and Congressman Nick Rahall met him in person.

“This is such a huge task facing us,” he said. “I want to keep this story alive. Those poor people really need our help.”

To contact staff writer Susan Williams, use e-mail or call 348-5112.