



Dr. Marc Levitt, left, of Cincinnati Children's Hospital, performs surgery with a Israeli physic: Dr. Yaron Armon, who is visiting Children's for a year from the Hadassah Medical Center.

Children's Hospital works to build Israel connections

Medical center sees nation as fertile territory for exchanges

BY JAMES RITCHIE

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Michael Fisher, Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center's CEO, wants to increase the organization's global influence.

He's starting with Israel.

That nation's culture of innovation makes it fertile ground for scientific, clinical and educational exchanges, said Fisher, who took over the highly ranked pediatric hospital last year. Israel has a national health system that, in some cases, pays for international care. That means it can be a source of paying customers for Cincinnati Children's.

Fisher and other Cincinnati Children's representatives, including physicians and researchers, traveled to Israel last month as part of the medical center's Israel Exchange Program. He's trying to expand an effort that's risen from connections individual researchers have there.

"We have a long to-do list," said Fisher, who took on the top post at Cincinnati Children's in 2010 from longtime CEO Jim Anderson.

MODEL OF COLLABORATION

Fisher said the Cincinnati Childrens' work with Israeli people and organizations will serve as a model for collaboration he'd like to foster in other countries, including India and China. A year ago, Cincinnati Children's hired a regional manager, Michelle Kohn, to navigate relationships in Israel. Her business card is printed in both English and Hebrew.

Cincinnati Children's officials signed new collaboration agreements with Tel Avis Sourasky Medical Center, Tel Aviv University and Ben Gurion University and renewed agreements with Hadassah Hospital Medical Center, Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Schneider Children's Medical Center.

The agreements are loose arrangements that generally call for sharing of research and clinical expertise and encourage Israeli patients and post-doctoral fellows to come to Cincinnati Children's.

Israel gets praise for its entrepreneurial culture, with, for example, 63 companies on the NASDAQ, more than any other country outside North America.

"They think globally from the second they

begin anything," Kohn said.

Pediatric hospital leaders are more anxious than ever about a hit to their domestic finances as federal lawmakers consider trillions of dollars in cuts, including reductions to Medicaid and Medicare, said Lawrence McAndrews, CEO of the Alexandria, Vabased National Association of Children's Hospitals and Related Institutions.

"Wherever you can develop patient referrals that will pay for costs and perhaps a little net gain, that starts to look very attractive, especially in situations where children's hospitals are also going to be confronting efforts by states to reduce costs," he said.

OVERSEAS TREATMENT

Israel, with a population of 7 million, has a highly developed medical system. But for certain conditions, including transplants and complex colorectal surgeries, patients often look overseas for treatment. Cincinnati Children's officials hope their institution will be a provider of choice for patients who need care they can't get at home.

So far business from Israel is still a trickle, but the numbers are increasing. Cincinnati Children's saw six patients from Israel last year and has seen eight so far this year.



Levitt

Dr. Marc Levitt, associate director of the colorectal center at Cincinnati Children's, operated on five Israeli children during the recent trip. He sees Israel as a template for collaboration in research, training and patient care. Work is already under way in China and several other areas.

"I suspect that in five years," Levitt said, "we would be actively involved with between five and 10 different countries."

Steve Shifman, president of the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati, said smart organizations are looking for opportunities to learn wherever they can find them.

The Israel collaboration, he said, "helps to raise the quality of care for Israel and the surrounding countries, and it has the chance to bring new technology and solutions back to Cincinnati, as well."