

Cincinnati Children's Israel Exchange Program Aims to Improve Child Health Worldwide

By: Mike Sarason
7/18/2011



The 10 flags outside the main entrance to Cincinnati Children's recognize the countries who have sent most patients to Cincinnati over the last year

now in key leadership positions in Israel." Over time, as more and more connections were made between these American doctors and their Israeli counterparts, the opportunity for a unique collaboration arose.

At the same time, Cincinnati Children's Global Health Center was looking for new ways to expand its mission of improved child health worldwide. "To be a leader in improving child health, we realized there was a need to expand our reach internationally," explained Michelle Kohn, Regional Manager for Israel in the Global Health Center. "The leadership of Children's took it upon themselves to develop a strategic plan to expand our reach on a global scale. Given the number of faculty already working individually with Israelis, Israel quickly emerged as not only a great opportunity for international collaboration, but also a country with an extraordinary amount to offer us."



Dr. Levitt operating at Schnieder's Medical Center of Israel, teaching Israeli Surgeons as he goes. Dr. Naftali Freud and Michael Fisher observe.

chairman of the board at Children's, Tom Cody, current CEO Michael Fisher, Jewish Federation of Cincinnati CEO Shep Englander, Mayerson JCC President Steve Shifman and more. "On the trip, the group visited Hadassah, Schneider's hospital, and more," added Levitt. "The trip made the idea of international care very real for our board members." Just over a year later, the Israel Exchange Program (IEP) has also become very real. So what does it at look like? Good question. Let me explain.

While international partnerships between hospitals, institutions and even universities are certainly not new, the IEP is innovative in that it is one coordinated effort with four distinct areas of focus. (1) **Education** is all about the exchange of medical students, residents, fellows, doctors and more between Israel and Cincinnati. To that end Cincinnati Children's has partnered with not only the hospitals in Israel, but also Ben Gurion University, Tel Aviv University and Hebrew University. (2) **Clinical Care** deals more directly with the care of patients both in Israel and Cincinnati. (3) **Research and Technology** bring together scientists working on joint projects that blend children's significant research capability with Israeli talent and innovation skills (4) **Quality Assurance and Improvement** is just that, raising the bar on child healthcare worldwide.

With these four focus areas in hand, Cincinnati Children's and the City of Cincinnati are both primed to be thrust into the limelight in a completely new way. Asked whether he believes the program will succeed, Levitt responded, "I believe it's already a smashing success. We still have more to do, but we've already accomplished a lot."

Now I don't want to overstate this...but I'll put it as bluntly as possible: Cincinnati Children's Hospital has a seriously innovative program on its hands, so much so that it may well completely change the game of Child Health on a global scale. Ok...now stop and re-read that last sentence again. Go on and think about that for a minute and in the meantime we'll back up a bit.

The program is called the Israel Exchange Program. This massive, multifaceted effort and all of its implications for the health world started over a decade ago with a few doctors at Cincinnati Children's and their own personal connections with Israel. "Some of the people involved were Dr. Marc Rothenberg, Dr. Eugene Minevich and myself," said Dr. Marc Levitt, of the Colorectal Center at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center (CCHMC). "Everyone was sort of doing their own thing; their own thing was going to Israel on occasion and collaborating with the corresponding scientist or doctor on the Israeli side, doing research and seeing patients."

Additionally, these doctors treated several Israelis back in Cincinnati at Children's. "While the Israel Exchange Program (IEP) was formally launched recently, we have also trained over 30 Israeli healthcare professionals over the past several decades," added Dr. Marc Rothenberg, "many of which are

Israel occupies a unique position as being a hotbed for innovation, entrepreneurialism and technology worldwide, as outlined in the book *Start Up Nation* (a book Levitt made almost everyone involved in the project read through). Companies like Google and Intel have already taken advantage of this cultural capital by opening offices in Israel. "Israel is also a small country, so you can very quickly map the opportunities throughout the country," added Kohn. "So we really thought it would be great place to start and build a model that can be expanded to other countries."

This interest led to a trip to Israel in the summer of 2009, instigated by the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati (which has now conducted several business missions to Israel), and included CEO of Children's at the time, Jim Anderson, as well as

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From Cincinnati's standpoint, the IEP represents a significant development to our growth and commerce sectors. Both



Michael Fisher, Dr. Levitt, Dr. Hirsch and Michelle Kohn from Cincinnati Children's with physicians and nurses from Hadassah Hospital trained at Children's

the Chamber of Commerce and CincyTech (a public-private partnership that invests in high-growth tech companies) have recognized this fact; a number of people from each organization have been to Israel on trade missions, together with people from Children's. "I think the community (in Cincinnati) recognizes how the program will help Cincinnati in our need to improve diversity, economic development, entrepreneurship, brainpower and visibility," Rothenberg said.

Equally important in this whole process has been the support of Cincinnati's Jewish community. "This is the only city that has such an organized program for welcoming Jews to our community," Levitt stated. "Be they a doctor or a nurse, a patient or their family, every time someone has come over from Israel, our community

has stepped forward to support them." Levitt cited two programs in particular, Bikur Cholim and the Jewish Federation's "My Family on Call," that have been instrumental in the process.

While the Israel Exchange Program has gathered much more steam over the past year, there's still a need for support at the ground level. "One of the hopes is that we can engage our community, especially the young Jewish community, to take an active role in these partnerships and to really be with us and see these relationships flourish," said Kohn. "There will be plenty of young Israelis coming to Cincinnati through this program and we're very hopeful that they'll be able to connect with our community here."

To learn more about the program and/or if you are interested in getting involved, please contact Michelle Kohn Michelle.Kohn@cchmc.org.



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