

Range of Motion Project helps trauma patients abroad

BY MATT BARON
Plunkett & Associates

One by one they came to the Range of Motion Project laboratory in Zacapa, Guatemala. There were 16 in all and each arrived in mid-October with his or her own story of struggle—how illness or violence had stripped them of one or both arms.

Among the most harrowing accounts were those of four women who were victims of machete attacks that, in each case, resulted in the amputation of both their arms as well as other injuries.

“It became very clear that domestic violence is a very real presence in that society,” said Eric Neufeld, ROMP’s co-founder and a certified professional orthotist at Scheck & Siress’s Lincoln Park location. “I was really happy that our organization was able to expand our services to help this group of people.”

Scheck & Siress has 11 clinics in the Chicago area, including one at 1701 E. Woodfield Rd., in Schaumburg.

One woman, accompanied by her 8-year-old daughter, had also lost an eye when she was attacked three years ago. The original design determined by the Guatemalan staff included a cosmetic arm to restore the way she was perceived in public, as well as by herself and family, said Neufeld.

“It was icing on the cake when we realized that they had brought all the components necessary to make her arm functional—able to grasp objects,” Neufeld said. “This was far more than this patient expected and the moment the project was done and she was able to actually use the prosthesis was exciting for her, her family and the ROMP team.”

“It was very emotional,” Neufeld added. “She was very grateful to have her appearance restored.”

Also treated were five men who were electrocuted as they worked in the construction trades.

“Safety regulations in construction there are not nearly as extensive as we’re used to here in the U.S.,” Neufeld said. “We saw quite a few patients who had electrical accidents.”

None of those treated were born without arms—all had suffered a trauma, whether through illness or accident. In some cases,



David Rotter of Scheck & Siress holds one of ROMP’s younger patients.

Photo submitted by Marc Altman

people had gone more than a decade without one or both arms.

“Their goals were really to achieve basic tasks of daily life, like cleaning and dressing themselves, and that’s all that we promised,” Neufeld said. “Beyond that, it’s up to them.”

Unlike prosthetic legs, which can be assembled piece-by-piece thanks to an abundance of donated parts, prosthetic arm parts are unusual and therefore typically need to be purchased.

In addition to fitting people with prostheses, ROMP trained local staff on the design, fabrication and fitting process.

The team of prosthetists and orthotists work mostly with leg amputees, so the trip provided an opportunity for these professionals to develop their abilities in providing patients with prosthetic arms. And those sharpened skills will bear fruit with their patients in the Chicago area, Neufeld said.

Because of the more technically complex nature of the work, ROMP staff and volunteers needed to take more time with each patient to focus their efforts.

During the weeklong visit, 14-hour days were the norm. Each patient had a Scheck & Siress practitioner, a local practitioner and a therapist.

“We are focused on doing as great of a job as possible because their resources are so limited there,” said Neufeld. “It’s so important to get it done properly when you’re there.”

—*Plunkett & Associates is a Chicago-based public affairs and communications firm.*

HEALTHBEAT

Scale may not be best fitness measure

Trying to get fit? Stop worrying about being up or down a few pounds.

Instead, doctors advise to pay attention to Body Mass Index and waist circumference.

Why? Because muscle weighs more than fat, weight may stay the same or even increase slightly as fat goes away.

There’s more to being fit than any single number, of course. But here’s a guide to sorting through the most important ones:

BMI

The most important number, according to all the doctors surveyed, is body mass index. Body mass index is weight in kilograms divided by height in meters squared.

Intimidating as that may sound, BMI calculators may be found at several sites online, including www.cdc.gov.

A BMI of 18.5 to 25 is ideal. A BMI of 25-30 is overweight. A BMI of over 30 is obese and brings a substantially increased risk of health issues, ranging from diabetes to depression.

Doctors warn that professional athletes may have a BMI that would be considered obese in an average person.

Dr. Riva L. Rahl, preventive medicine physician and medical director at the Cooper Wellness Program, estimates that tennis superstar Venus Williams may have a BMI that would classify her as overweight.

Dr. Nick Nicholson, bariatric surgeon on the Baylor medical staff, estimates that by BMI standards, many Dallas Cowboys players would be considered morbidly obese.

The doctors agree that individuals shouldn’t judge their fitness by the standards of a professional athlete. At the same time, Nicholson adds that exercise is such an important component of fitness that people with a BMI of 30 who exercise four days a week have a lower risk of a heart attack than people with a BMI of 24 who don’t exercise.

Waist size

Waist circumference is not pants size but the number of inches around the waist as calculated by a tape measure at the smallest area above the belly button.

Regardless of height, for men, waist size should be less than 40 inches and, for women, under 35 inches. Above those levels and the risks for cardiovascular disease, hypertension, strokes and some cancers significantly increases.

Triceps

Triceps skin-fold thickness can be found on the back of the upper arm. The number of inches is directly related to an individual’s underlying body fat. This is a difficult measurement to make on one’s own. It usually requires a medical or fitness professional.

Fitness numbers for children

Dr. LeAnn Kridelbaugh, pediatrician and physician nutrition specialist at Children’s Medical Center Dallas, says you can’t apply adult fitness numbers to children because children are still growing.

“With kids these numbers are moving targets,” she said. “A normal BMI or waist circumference for a 10 year old would be horrific for a 5 year old. Although there are some norms for waist circumference, we don’t focus on them. Instead pediatricians plot a child’s height, weight and BMI on a curve.”

Kridelbaugh says pediatricians should establish on each visit what percentile a child falls in according to his or her age and gender. In general, if the BMI is between the 85th and 95th percentile for weight the child is considered overweight, with over 95th percentile being obese and over 99th percentile morbidly obese.

But for most children the key is to see whether their percentile changes from year to year.

“If you see that one year a child is in the 50th percentile and the next year he is in the 75th percentile that’s cause for concern even if the BMI is still in the normal range,” Kridelbaugh said.

—*McClatchy-Tribune Media Services*