

## **AAHPO Program Named for Dr. Raffy Hovnessian Aims to Help Karabakh Physicians**

**By Stephan S. Nigohosian**

Among the horrific damage resulting from the war in Artsakh, both in 2020 and again this year, is the tremendous strain and destruction it has caused on the region's already fragile healthcare system. The treatment of Artsakh's civilian casualties and injured servicemen defending the territory is disproportionate to the number of trained medical professionals who are qualified to properly treat them. Fortunately, there is relief in sight.

Now in its 11th year, the recently renamed Armenian American Health Professionals Organization (AAHPO) Dr. Raffy Hovnessian Medical Education Program has provided doctors in the rural regions of Artsakh with the training needed to master innovative approaches, methods and technologies from top healthcare providers in Yerevan, free of cost. The program also focuses on maintaining and developing knowledge, skills and relationships through month-long trainings for regional doctors to ensure competent practice in the future. To date, more than 250 Armenian healthcare providers have gained critical skills by earning Continuing Medical Education (CME) credits through the program. Their knowledge then spreads exponentially when graduates return to their rural villages and share their expertise with fellow physicians. Areas of study are wide-ranging and include critically needed areas such as cardiology, oncology, infectious diseases, children's illnesses, geriatrics, genitourinary, orthopedic and diabetes education. As a result, the quality of life and contemporary healthcare services available to Armenian citizens in Artsakh has greatly improved.

A fundraiser to support the AAHPO, Dr. Raffy Hovnessian Medical Education Program will be held on October 16 at the New Jersey home of AAHPO President Lawrence Najarian, MD, to raise critical funds for the program. "Similar to the United States, CME is now required of all

physicians by the government of Armenia so they receive yearly medical information," reports Najarian. "Our program offers these credits and living accommodations free of charge to eligible healthcare professionals, taking the financial burden off of their shoulders and enabling them to treat the citizens of Artsakh."

In 2011, AAHPO and the Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR), through the vision of the late Dr. Raffy A. Hovnessian, recognized the depth and urgency of the lack of up-to-date healthcare services and training for medical professionals in Armenia and Artsakh. Both organizations partnered to fund the CME Program, which is vital to training physicians and nurses as tens of thousands of Armenians in the region depend on their medical skills. Dr. Hovnessian's wife and daughter, Vicki Shoghag Hovnessian and Ani Hovnessian, continue his legacy by funding programs like the AAHPO CME program to benefit the healthcare needs of Armenians in the homeland.

Although providing Armenians in Artsakh with vitally needed healthcare services is an important focus of the AAHPO, Dr. Raffy Hovnessian Medical Education Program, it is worth noting that the patients are not the sole beneficiaries. Doctors and healthcare professionals who participate in the program gain a sense of personal and professional accomplishment from helping their brethren in need. Dr. Anahit Petrosyan, a native of Stepanakert who has conducted bio analysis at Arevik Medical Center for Children in Artsakh, heard about many cases of children from remote regions who were not able to get medical help due to the lack of medical personnel and proper equipment. She was inspired to further to enhance her skills by joining the program this year, where she spent one month honing her skills in hematology and biochemistry by studying clinical cases at Muratsan Hospital Complex in Yerevan, with all education and housing expenses

covered by the AAHPO program. "This was my first CME training and it more than met my expectations," she said. "As specialists, we have to do our best to care for the children and their parents." Dr. Petrosyan has decided to dedicate her life and work to the people of Artsakh.

Artsakh native Dr. Narine Beglaryan, a general pediatrician, pediatric and nephrologist from Stepanakert Children's Hospital, is currently enrolled in the program for the third time. "The courses offered are specific to my professional field and the practical and theoretical knowledge I've gained has enabled me to improve the medical service and care of my patients," she said.

Another important program initiative has been held with National Institute of Health of Armenia and Stroke Initiative Group (SIATA). Recently, both organizations jointly started a six-month fellowship program for neurologists from Armenia and Artsakh with the purpose of establishing modern stroke centers in regions in those regions. The AAHPO CME program financially underwrites the participation of one of the first fellows selected for this course, Dr. Narine Danielyan, a neurologist from the Stepanakert Republican Hospital.

"The program's trained and motivated healthcare professionals are a tremendous asset in their Communities," reports Hambarzum Simonyan, MD, FAR Deputy Country Director/ Health Programs Director. "They ensure better quality healthcare service on a grassroots level that leads to decreased morbidity and mortality rates."

For more information on supporting the AAHPO, Dr. Raffy Hovnessian Medical Education Program, including attending the October 16 charity fundraiser in New Jersey, email [info@aaampo.org](mailto:info@aaampo.org)