

Documenting relief

Newport doctor will return to Pakistan with film crew to show aid efforts there after October quake.

By Michael Miller

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Salman Naqvi has ventured to Pakistan twice in the last three months, witnessing firsthand the devastation that an earthquake brought to the country.

In October, the Newport Beach physician spent eight days in a medical tent, treating any patients who walked in; just before New Year's, he returned to visit tent villages where survivors were huddling in the winter chill.

Later this month, Naqvi is heading to his country of birth again -- and this time, he's taking the world along for the ride.

Naqvi, 43, who runs his own pulmonary and critical-care practice, will venture to Pakistan on Jan. 23 with a documentary film crew sponsored by Relief International. The film, narrated by actor Ben Kingsley, is part of a larger series that Relief International is planning on natural disasters around the world. Naqvi will assist the crew as a translator, consultant and liaison with Pakistani authorities.

"There's a lot left to do, but hopefully we've started something that will progress into something big," the Irvine resident said about his work in the ravaged country.

In December, Relief International -- a Los Angeles-based organization that sponsored Naqvi's previous trips to Pakistan -- hosted a party in Beverly Hills with Naqvi, Kingsley and film director Richard Attenborough in attendance. Relief International had recently launched the Gandhi Project, in which aid workers screened Attenborough's 1982 film "Gandhi" in Palestinian schools and refugee camps to teach them about nonviolence.

With the Gandhi Project accelerating, Relief International opted to begin a film series of its own. Public relations director Jennifer Norris said the final results would be short documentaries, about a half an hour in length, that the agency would market to public television stations. At the party, Naqvi met Kingsley and Attenborough and agreed to participate in the film project.

"His connection is being from Pakistan and still having family over there," Norris said. "He's able to provide us with connections not only in the government, but local affiliations that are necessary for a film crew to shoot a documentary in that country."

For eight to 10 days, Naqvi and the crew -- including acclaimed documentary filmmaker Chip Duncan -- will travel around the desolate reaches of the Himalayas,

where a 7.8-magnitude earthquake hit on Oct. 8 and killed as many as 100,000 people. Entire towns collapsed during the quake, said to be the worst to hit the region in the last 100 years.

Since then, both Naqvi and his wife, Farzana, have made two trips to Pakistan. The country that he visited at the end of December was in better shape than two months earlier -- but not by much. Flying back to the United States on Dec. 27, the doctor worried about conditions in the coming season.

"It wasn't snowing at that time," Naqvi said. "It's started to snow now, so things have probably changed a little for the worse."

Cold is just one of many problems faced by Pakistanis in the earthquake region, and Naqvi has tried to do as much as possible. In November, he hosted a fundraiser at the Doubletree Hotel in Santa Ana, with Pakistan's consul general and other Relief International officials in attendance. The event, which included a live auction and video presentation, netted around \$180,000 to help reconstruct a village.

The money, Norris said, would go to Bhogermang, a village of 2,200 that lost its mosque, hospital, school and homes in the earthquake. The village sits near the area where the documentary crew will be filming.

Norris described the films' subject matter as "forgotten emergencies" and said her organization's goal was to remind viewers that the crises, despite fading from the headlines, had not gone away.

When asked how many documentaries Relief International planned to make, she replied, "Hopefully, not very many. Hopefully, not many emergencies get forgotten."