

## Good Medicine: Pharmacist provides dose of caring

BY JEREMY HULL

When faced with the ongoing suffering of the people of Iraq, many often ask what they could possibly do. With so many experiencing hunger, illness and senseless violence, how would someone even begin to help?

Nidhal Kappouta asked herself these same questions after learning of the countless civilian deaths in Iraq due to a critical lack of medical supplies. The answers took her back to her birthplace with almost a million dollars in medical supplies.

"I realized that in America, many of us have too much," said Kappouta. "And the cost of a purse ... a single piece of clothing, could do so much more for the people of Iraq."

Since early 2005, Kappouta, who owns Nidhal's Pharmacy in Farmington Hills and Sterling Heights, has devoted much of her time and her own money to sending medicine and recycled medical equipment to hospitals in Iraq. Working with Detroit-based World Medical Relief, Kappouta helps to coordinate donations of medical supplies between local pharmacists, doctors and hospitals, which are then organized and shipped to the Middle East.

Started in 1953 by Detroit housewife Irene Auberline, World Medical Relief began collecting food, baby clothing and medicine to ship overseas during the Korean War. Auberline had originally worked to help a single boy orphaned during the war. But with the help of her husband, Lester, the charitable venture quickly expanded into a worldwide mission to collect recycled medical equipment, supplies and medicine to help thousands of people throughout the world.

Kappouta initially approached World Medical Relief while searching for some way to help Iraqis. Shortly thereafter, she used her medical knowledge and charisma to persuade doctors to part with pharmaceutical samples and slightly used medical supplies.

"Doctors throw away so many prescription samples," she said, "and this medicine can really benefit someone else in need."

In addition to medicine, donations by the Detroit-area medical community have ranged from small yet still extremely vital items like sponges, scissors, gauze and bandages, to larger equipment such as walkers, wheelchairs and artificial limbs. Several hospitals have even contributed ultrasound and diagnostic machines — technology that is often nonexistent in many Iraqi hospitals.

Although the doctors are desperate for even the smallest supplies in both large and small cities, Kappouta said they all share a need for items that demonstrate just how bleak the situation is. "The number one item the hospitals in Iraq are in need of is body

bags," she said. "The second is refrigeration space to store the bodies."

Recent statistics tell a grim story of just how serious everyday life has become for civilians in Iraq. A report in the October issue of the *British Medical Journal* indicated that more than 14,338 Iraqi civilians were killed between January and June of 2006, while more than 57,000 were injured during May and June. The report states that doctors working in Iraq admit that more than half of the civilians killed could have been saved if better medical equipment and more experienced staff were available.

In order to better understand the situation in Iraq, Kappouta traveled with the first shipment of supplies as it made its way through the Middle East in January.

**"The cost of a purse ... a single piece of clothing, could do so much more for the people of Iraq."** — NIDHAL KAPPOUTA

have to send out a volunteer to get food because it is so dangerous."

A second shipment of donated medical supplies that was coordinated by Kappouta — valued at more than \$460,000 — traveled to Iraq in October. A third shipment, valued at \$12,000 provided by an anonymous donor, left in November. Kappouta hoped to return on that trip, only her third since she left Iraq in 1980.

"I'm very in touch with my people in Iraq," Kappouta said. "They give to their own when they don't have anything."

In addition to financial contributions, medical supplies and recycled medical equipment, World Medical Relief relies on the assistance of volunteers to sort



Nidhal Kappouta shows some artificial limbs, donated to World Medical Relief, which will be sent to Iraq.

Valued at more than \$400,000, the 40-foot-long cargo container of medical equipment was met by Iraqi doctors who helped to ensure that the neediest hospitals received the supplies.

Even though she could not stay in Iraq for a lengthy period due to safety reasons, Kappouta said what she witnessed while briefly back in her homeland only further reinforced her dedication to help.

"People don't leave their homes," she said. "They

donated items and to ready shipments for travel to other countries.

"If you can't give money, then you can give your time," said Kappouta. "You don't have to speak the language to help." 🐾

To learn more about donating medical equipment or volunteer opportunities, call World Medical Relief at (313) 866-5333 or visit [www.worldmedicalrelief.org](http://www.worldmedicalrelief.org).