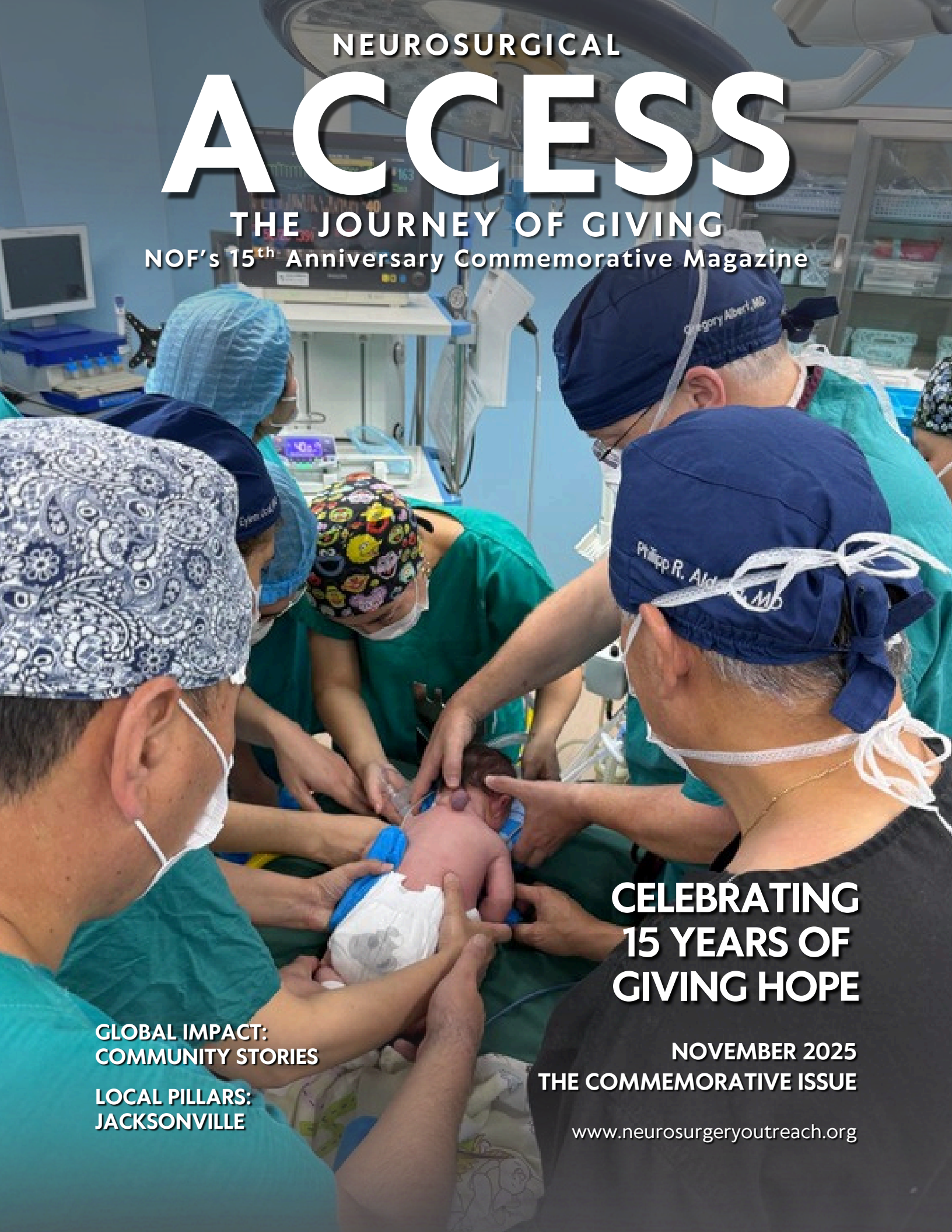




NEUROSURGICAL ACCESS

THE JOURNEY OF GIVING
NOF's 15th Anniversary Commemorative Magazine

**CELEBRATING
15 YEARS OF
GIVING HOPE**

**GLOBAL IMPACT:
COMMUNITY STORIES**

**LOCAL Pillars:
JACKSONVILLE**

**NOVEMBER 2025
THE COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE**

www.neurosurgeryoutreach.org





Why is our involvement with NOF so meaningful to us?

"Giving back is more than an act—it's a mindset. When service becomes part of who you are as a person and a company, it shapes how you lead, how you grow, and how you support others in need. Supporting an organization like NOF means helping bring life-changing neurosurgical care to children and underserved communities in places like the Philippines and Mongolia. Whether it's through surgical missions or equipment, it's a reminder that real impact isn't measured by what we achieve—but by who we lift up along the way."

—Will Titoras, President, KLS Martin

KLS martin
GROUP

Table of Contents

08

A MARRIAGE BUILT THIS FOUNDATION

A partnership of a lifetime of service

15

GLOBAL IMPACT: COMMUNITY STORIES

Stories of service trips, beneficiaries, and awardees

25

THE JOURNEY OF GIVING: 15 YEARS

Giving becomes a way of life

37

LOCAL Pillars: Jacksonville

A feature on some of the people with NOF through the years

43

NOF: THE FRIENDLY FORCE IN GLOBAL NEUROSURGERY

NOF makes its mark in the global neurosurgery scene

ACCESS

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Cover: NOF doctors Eylem Ocal, Philipp Aldana, and Gregory Albert working alongside Mongolian doctors to perform their first repair of cervical myelomeningocele in a newborn, ESM Mongolia 2025.



From the Editor

A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step. That single step of an idea, from two people brainstorming while driving home led to establishing the Neurosurgery Outreach Foundation, a non-profit that has now officially journeyed 15 years.

This commemorative magazine looks back, takes stock of the present, and looks forward to the future of global neurosurgical care towards making it accessible to those who need it most. It also tells the story of how doctors, health care professionals, donors, executives, administrators, volunteers, and patients' lives intersect through the community that NOF has built.

The ties that bind this community together remain strong and can only be attributed to the shared concept of giving. It also takes it a step further, making giving a lifestyle that continues to this day in pursuit of NOF's vision: creating a world where everyone has access to safe, adequate neurosurgical care.

Judith Garcia-Meese
Judith Garcia-Meese
Editor-in-Chief

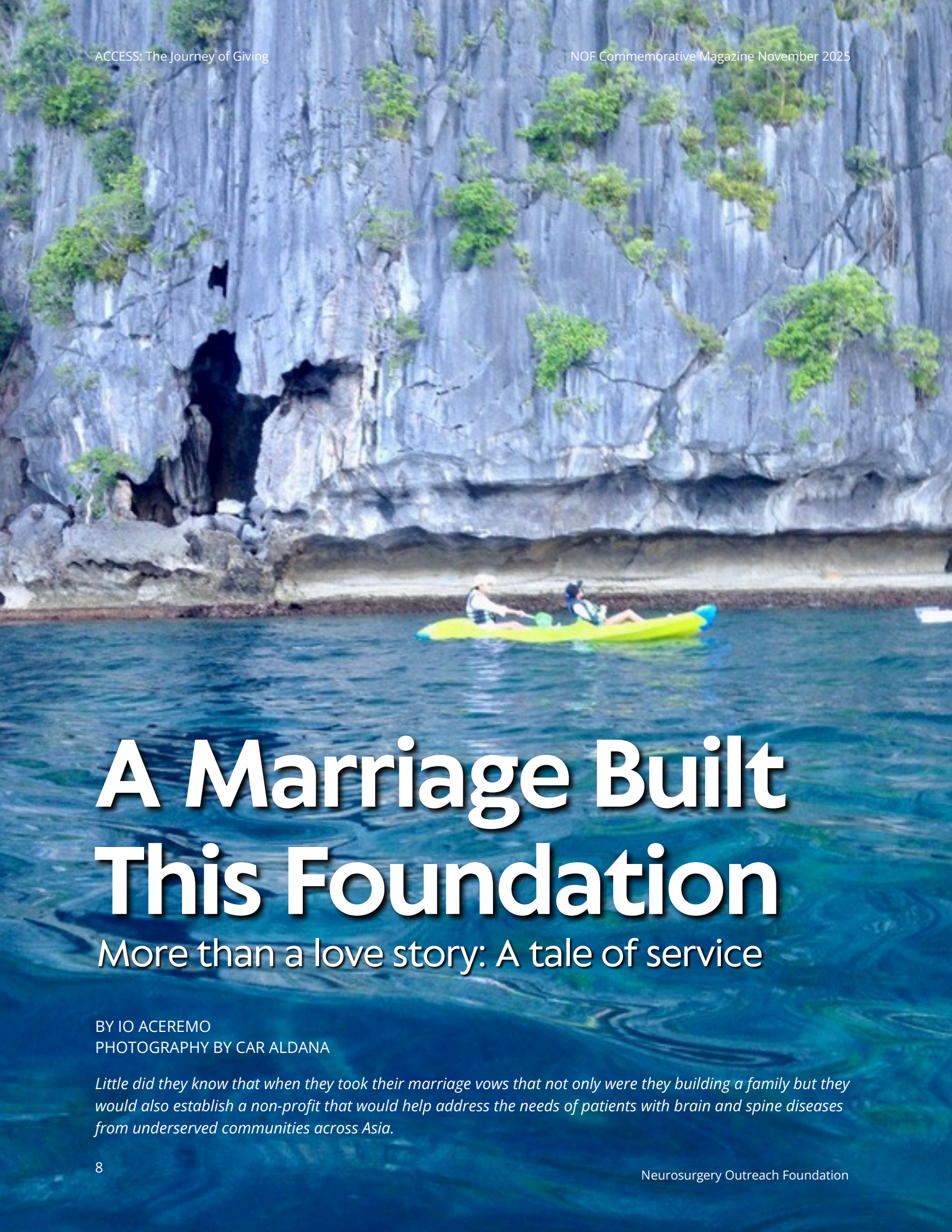
Greetings



"It wasn't just the high standards of pediatric neurosurgical care that impressed me---it was the shared spirit, the deep collaboration and the culture of kindness that radiated across institutions. I left with a renewed sense of purpose: to bring that spirit home, to one day help build something similar in Indonesia, and to encourage others to dream bigger." — Dr. Muhammad Dicky Hidayattullah, Indonesia

"Congratulations, NOF for this incredible milestone you have achieved! May you continue to extend your help to the underserved communities around the world by providing excellent neurosurgical care. You are an inspiration." — Dr. Emmanuel Albano, Philippines

"NOF doctors' guidance, advice, and the medical equipment generously donated by NOF team have become an immeasurable source of support, helping to save the lives of thousands of Mongolian children." — Dr. Ardagyeldi "Ardka" Burkirkhan, Mongolia

A full-page background image showing a couple in a yellow kayak on a body of water. In the background is a large, grey, craggy rock cliff with some green vegetation growing on it. The water is a deep blue-green color.

A Marriage Built This Foundation

More than a love story: A tale of service

BY IO ACEREMO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CAR ALDANA

Little did they know that when they took their marriage vows that not only were they building a family but they would also establish a non-profit that would help address the needs of patients with brain and spine diseases from underserved communities across Asia.



Opposite page: Dr. Philipp Aldana and Carmina Montesa Aldana on a kayak exploring the islands of Apulit, Palawan, Philippines. (Above) Walking up a mountain in Cebu to reach a family's home in an ESM. (Below) Visiting NOF scholars in Bandung, Indonesia.

Years before the NOF was set up, the couple became aware of the desperate situation of patients who suffered from neurosurgical diseases and disorders during family visits to Cebu province, the hometown of Dr. Philipp Aldana. His father, the late Dr. Benigno Aldana Jr., was a consultant neurosurgeon in the government-run hospital Vicente Sotto Memorial Medical Center (VSMMC) in the 1960s until 2013. The elder Dr. Aldana received referrals from nearby provinces in the Visayas to as far as Mindanao.

At the onset, the couple would give medical books, journals, and equipment requested by the elder Dr. Aldana who in turn gave them to resident-doctors. Family vacations also included giving lectures and participating in neurosurgical missions.

For Dr. Philipp Aldana and Carmina Montesa Aldana, the dire reality of neurosurgical care in rural Philippines was something they could



neither disregard nor forget. Montesa Aldana shared, “There were babies suffering from hydrocephalus who were abandoned in community shelters. Their mothers felt they had no other option.” Dr. Aldana revealed that due to the systemic limited resources in the Philippines islands, the rate of recovery for patients with brain aneurysm is greatly diminished. Even with healthcare resources, 50% of patients do not survive. The difference in healthcare systems and the extreme lack of resources made it difficult for doctors to treat neurosurgery patients. Caring for patients was harder both for the families and their doctors. “Hirap talaga ang mga families (it is extremely difficult for the families),” Dr. Aldana said.

Over time, husband and wife knew that if they wanted to truly help, it was going to go beyond what they could carry and hand out. “Early in our marriage,” Montesa Aldana confided, “we realized we wanted a life that included giving back to the community.”

In 2009, during a two-hour drive from Disneyworld, Orlando, to Jacksonville with their twin children, the young couple asked each other, “How can we make this better? How can we multiply what we have been doing?” By the time they reached home, the beginnings of the NOF were laid down: better access to neurosurgery through service, education, and support.



Dr. Philipp Aldana and Carmina Montesa Aldana visiting the University of the Philippines - Philippine General Hospital (UP-PGH).



(Above) L-R The late Dr. Benigno Aldana Jr., Carmina Montesa Aldana and Dr. Philipp Aldana during the very first ESM in Cebu, Philippines in 2010. (Below) A young neurosurgeon from Vietnam receiving his copy of the book donated by Dr. Laura Grand in honor of author and her late husband, Dr. Walter Grand.



The possibility of helping beyond their capabilities became more real when NOF was finally incorporated in 2010. The non-profit held its first educational surgical mission (ESM) in Cebu and first fund raising event in 2011.

NOF's cornerstone: Education, Service, and Support

"When we started this journey, we had always dreamed that it was education-based," Carmina Montesa Aldana said.

Education

NOF's Educational Surgical Mission is the main onsite program building activity. It is a comprehensive, collaborative, education-based and sustainable outreach initiative.

NOF had five outreach sites in the Philippines: Cebu, Dagupan, Manila, Davao and General Santos, with hospitals in three of these becoming partner sites. NOF's expansion to other hospital sites other than the Philippines is anchored in response. Montesa Aldana said, "We saw that there was a demand, and we responded to that need—from the ones we service, our beneficiaries, to those who wanted to volunteer."



Dr. Philipp Aldana (2nd from right) teaching neurosurgical residents during NOF's first ESM in 2010 in Cebu, Philippines.

Service

NOFs impact has reached people in Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Malawi, Malaysia, Mongolia, Morocco, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Turkey, and Vietnam.

Both co-founders grew up in families that were deeply involved in social responsibility and community work. Dr. Philipp Aldana grew up with a father who delivered health care to many in need, especially since he was the only neurosurgeon in the southern region of the Philippines. Carmina Montesa, a daughter of a diplomat, grew up seeing how community service transformed lives.

On behalf of NOF, they accepted the 2024 Presidential Awards for Filipino Individuals and Organizations Overseas that recognizes NOF's "exceptional contributions to the welfare of Filipinos and national development."



The Aldana family giving back together at ESM 2022.

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When we started this journey, we had always dreamed that it was education-based.

Surgical Support

"We hope," Dr. Aldana said, "that the values of NOF and its resources will continue to inspire and empower more neurosurgeons to engage in global outreach programs."

Our personal life and partnership

While NOF is important, family remains at the center of their lives. Their personal goal to build a happy and healthy family also extends to one of the couple's aims for NOF—to lend a helping hand to families to bounce back from illness or medical difficulties. Montesa Aldana recalls that when she learned that a mother was told that her child was not worthy to have surgery, "That just got me. How dare you say that. Such stories fuel my passion. I always look at it from the perspective of the family; the hardships that they would have to go through."



(Above) Dr. Villamor at VSSMC inspecting aneurysm clips donated by NOF from Mizuho America. (Below) Carmina Montesa Aldana comforting a boy in Mongolia in May 2025.





(Above) Dr. Philipp and Carmina Montesa Aldana visiting the PGH ward. (Below) Walking through the OR at Hasan Sadikin Hospital, Bandung, Indonesia.



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I think our strength as a couple lies in recognizing and respecting each other's strengths. We complement each other.

Other than their shared values and determination in helping address the needs of their patients, husband and wife attribute the dynamics of their partnership has made the NOF successful. They complement each other. And enjoy each other's company. "It's fun to work with my husband," Montesa Aldana quickly points out. "We like being together."

Dr. Aldana adds that a key factor that helped them juggle family and the Foundation is time management. Although, there are times when one or the other had to put in extra time for work such late evenings and duties on weekends.

He, the doctor, is the surgeon who provides the medical expertise, the one who knows the medical conditions of their patients. On top of his high caliber surgical skills is a heartwarming bedside manner towards his patients.

While her strength lies in organizational management, on her strong work ethic that results in getting things done, and most importantly, in putting the systems in place in the NOF.

A partnership at home and in the NOF.



(Clockwise from top) Dr. Ardka Burkirkhan with Dr. Eylem Ocal examining a young patient with cerebral palsy in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

Global Impact: Stories from the Communities

By Judith Garcia-Meese and Carmina Montesa Aldana

The need for global surgical care is immense with an estimated 5 billion individuals worldwide without access to surgical or anesthetic care and 16.9 million estimated annually to die of conditions wanting surgical care. In neurosurgery, approximately 5.2 million surgical cases per year go untreated due to lack of neurosurgical capacity. To meet this global deficit, around 23,000 more neurosurgeons are needed, especially in low- and middle-income countries.*

There are places in Asia and Africa that may have more than 5,000,000 people for every neurosurgeon. Of the 5 billion people around the world without access to surgery, there are 14 million neurosurgery cases every year.

Many people around the world suffer from diseases of the brain and spine. They are unable to access adequate and safe medical care.



Dr. Aldana speaking to a mother of a child in the Philippines, ESM 2018.

Recognizing this global issue, NOF was founded to promote the advancement of neurosurgical care of the diseases of the brain and spine in underserved communities worldwide through service, education, and support. It aims to make treatments more accessible using a sustainable, collaborative, education-based approach. NOF reaches out to disadvantaged communities, so that no one is deprived of the neurosurgical care they need.

Outreach Service Trips: Beyond Diplomacy

Diplomacy (noun): the profession, activity, or skill of managing international relations, typically by a country's representative abroad.

From its inception, NOF operated in an egalitarian manner. With this knowledge and a relationship-building mindset, the approach to collaborate and partner with local sites were likely to be more dynamic and the interactions amicable. Shared goals are determined, and commitments are established. This is not only done in theory, but also through processes and orientations designed to maximize connections. NOF applied some of its principles from the core components of diplomacy: negotiation, communication, representation, and relationship-building.



(Left) NOF team in Mongolia discussing surgery to treat hydrocephalus on the operating table.

(Below) NOF team in Cebu in a surgical discussion with local neurosurgeons.



Finding common interests was easy. NOF goes beyond diplomacy while putting the local perspective at the forefront. Factually, there are under- or low-resourced sites. There is also an inadequate number of neurosurgeons to serve the population, and should a community have access to resources, they can likely provide adequate and safe neurosurgical care. There is also a need to communicate sensitive cultural differences and to negotiate the means to reach shared goals required finesse and skill.

Apart from being an excellent surgeon, one of the most sought after personal traits in a volunteer surgeon for NOF is humility. Volunteer neurosurgeons must possess an honest self-awareness of their motivation for involvement and a healthy dose of humility to be able to clearly listen to what is needed and must accept that "our way" may not always work and be open to learning.



(Above) Dr. Wayne Gluf working in Manila with PGH residents to help treat a severe infection of the spine. (Bottom page) Dr. Patricia Clerkin performing surgery using an operating microscope in ESM 2022.

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NOF is a mission that serves
humanity and practices
neurosurgery in its purest
sense.

These core values are incorporated through NOF's many programs: Educational Surgical Mission (ESM), Educational Awards, Neurosurgical Program Building and Equipment, and Patient Support. Through this, NOF's network of doctors and volunteers is able to reach out to people in low- to middle-income countries, helping bridge the gap in the lack of neurosurgical care in underserved communities.

Dr. Wayne Gluf, a distinguished neurosurgeon and a decorated U.S. naval officer, has been part of the NOF network since 2022. He was former Chairman of Neurosurgery at the Naval Medical Center in San Diego. Dr. Gluf has participated in two ESMs in the Philippines and as a result, has seen up-close and personal the impact of NOF's mission in advancing neurosurgical care through service, education, and support.

"I'd like to believe," Dr. Gluf said, "that everyone who has ever entered medical school has done so with the goal of serving and bettering the lives of their fellow man. Certainly, that remains my medical mission and what I believe God has asked of me in my life. In my years of medicine, no organization, no time I have spent as a neurosurgeon greater exemplifies the spirit of service than my time with NOF."





Dr. Belinda Shao (middle) working with neurosurgeons in Davao, Philippines to correct a congenital malformation of the skull and face.

"NOF is a mission that serves humanity and practices neurosurgery in its purest sense. The Aldanas have created an organization focused on ethically, compassionately, and efficiently serving our brothers and sisters with the greatest need. NOF has helped train neurosurgery residents both in the operating room and in academic didactic conferences, and also brought much needed and prohibitively expensive equipment to large, academic medical centers in the Philippines. They have developed and implemented a vision for making healthcare in the Philippines better and more accessible to those with the greatest need," Dr. Gluf added. He believes there will be no shortage of volunteers who would want to join ESMs.

Dr. Ricardo Hanel, one of the Board of Directors of NOF, adds, "Our mission trip to the Philippines was simply amazing: a full display of service, above self, teaching and treating the less privileged, sharing ideas and resources."

One of NOF's educational awards is the JB Resident Award for Global Neurosurgery that is supported by the JB Foundation. The goals of the award are for US-based neurosurgeons in training to obtain valuable work experience in the field of global neurosurgery, acquire new perspectives and respect for other healthcare models, and gain personal growth and inspiration to advance neurosurgical care in underserved communities.

Dr. Belinda Shao, a neurosurgery resident based in the US, underwent a 6-week rotation at the University of the Philippines-Philippine General Hospital (UP-PGH) in Manila through the Sanjiv Bhatia Global Pediatric Neurosurgery Travel Grant (AANS/CNS Pediatric Section). She was joined by mentors from NOF: Dr. Philipp Aldana, Dr. Ariana Barkley, and Dr. Patricia Clerkin. Local mentor and 2014 NOF Educational Awardee Dr. Ronnie Baticulon was also part of the team.

The experience prompted her to continue the path that earned Dr. Shao the NOF's JB Resident Award for Global Neurosurgery in 2023. Her exposure to the healthcare system of UP-PGH, the Philippines' premiere charity hospital that caters to the neediest of Filipinos, only strengthened her desire to make a difference in health equity.



Dr. Belinda Shao examining a baby with hydrocephalus in Davao, Philippines in 2024.

Experiencing pediatric neurosurgical care first-hand in the Philippines left a lasting impression on Dr. Shao. "Regarding pathology and surgery, I learned loads about managing and operating on myelomeningocele, complex dysraphism, infectious pathologies, massive brain tumors, and other diseases in children that are not as common in my training at home. I also learned myriad ways to operate without some supplies that I am used to having in the US. I will take these pearls with me into my future pediatric neurosurgical career.

I was truly able to appreciate the everyday aspects of practicing neurosurgery as a resident at PGH within an low- and middle-income infrastructure—both challenges as well as advantages in comparison to training in the US. I was invited to collaborate in research and quality improvement with ongoing projects and hopefully more to come," shared Dr. Shao.



(Front row L-R) Dr. Ariana Barkley and Dr. Emmanuel Albano, both NOF educational awardees, working side by side during ESM 2022.

From Awardee to Service Leader

The interest among young neurosurgeons to engage in global neurosurgery has steadily increased. The motivation ranges from a resumé-builder that sets one apart for residency match to genuine interest in global neurosurgery. The NOF selection committee faces the challenging task of identifying which applicant for the JB Resident Award for Global Neurosurgery shows the greatest potential to fulfill their aspirations in global neurosurgery.

NOF launched its first JB Resident Award for Global Neurosurgery in 2021 that was awarded to Dr. Ariana Barkley, a University of Alabama Pediatric Neurosurgery Fellow at that time. Dr. Barkley already had some experience in global neurosurgery in Cambodia. When she won the award and joined the ESM team in 2022 in the Philippines, she shined. Aside from her surgical skills, Dr. Barkley exhibited many traits that suggested she had the well-being, grit, compassion, and determination to incorporate global neurosurgery into her future career.

After her ESM experience, Dr. Barkley stayed on as one of NOF's volunteer neurosurgeons. Her dream, however, to give back to her home region was never far from her vision.

Now a practicing neurosurgeon at the University of Colorado, she is incorporating global neurosurgery into her practice. Together with NOF, the possibility of her dream to advance pediatric neurosurgical care in the Caribbean lies within the horizon.

Shares Dr. Barkley, "I've had the privilege of receiving advanced training, and I believe it's only right to use that knowledge to help contribute to building something sustainable. Supporting neurosurgical capacity in my homeland isn't just about medicine—it's about equity, sustainability, and honoring the roots that continue to influence who I am today."



Drs. Aldana, Barkley, and Clerkin doing post-operative rounds in PGH, Manila.

Beneficiaries

NOF grants educational awards to deserving young neurosurgery residents from underserved countries. Applicants undergo a stringent selection process. To date, 88 neurosurgeons have been awarded in 18 countries that includes Indonesia, Philippines, Nepal and Cambodia among others.

One of the first programs that NOF started was the Benigno S. Aldana Jr. Educational Fund which was established after NOF's first fundraising event in 2011. The Asian-Australasian Advanced Course in Pediatric Neurosurgery (AAACPN) was the first course it supported, providing a modest educational award to cover the registration costs of neurosurgery residents who would then be able to attend the conference for free. The AAACPN provided a structured curriculum in pediatric neurosurgery from global experts. The education it provided was much needed by the neurosurgeons in training.

Indonesia

Over the years, the number of recipients of this award has steadily increased with the majority—22 in total—coming from Indonesia. All but one of these recipients come from the city of Bandung.

The large number of recipients from Bandung was mainly due to the efforts of Dr. Mirna Sobana, the sole pediatric neurosurgeon of the Hasan Sadikin Hospital, Neurosurgery Department in Bandung, serving a population of 11 million. A passionate advocate of continuing education, she has always motivated her residents to pursue any opportunity to learn more about pediatric neurosurgery. With her constant support and encouragement, neurosurgery residents at her hospital applied for the NOF award to attend the AAACPN. For the residents, the AAACPN conference was a rare opportunity for them to attend an international conference for free by applying for the NOF award.

“

They have developed and implemented a vision for making healthcare in the Philippines better and more accessible to those with the greatest need.



NOF team participated in a conference hosted by the Department of Neurosurgery at the Hassan Sadikin Hospital in Bandung, Indonesia.

(Below) Dr. Astri Avianti at Yarsi Hospital in Jakarta expressing her gratitude to the visiting NOF team
(Right) Dr. Ocal teaching the neurosurgery residents in Bandung.



Notable too is the story of Dr. Astri Avianti, one of NOF's first awardees, who was able to achieve her dream of becoming a pediatric neurosurgeon in Indonesia. She is one of the founding members of the Indonesian Pediatric Neurosurgery Society along with Dr. Mirna. A faculty member of YARSI University, Dr. Astri is also the lead neurosurgeon at YARSI University Hospital. She has organized several pediatric neurosurgery courses, including a conference in 2025 on the Multi-Disciplinary Care of Spina Bifida with speakers from NOF.

Dr. Philipp Aldana shares that despite the modest nature of the award, there was a profound impact on the lives and careers of the neurosurgery residents of Bandung. "For many, it was the first time they realized they could receive international recognition, an experience that not only deepened their understanding of pediatric neurosurgery but also allowed them to build lasting friendships with peers from different countries across Asia. The increase in confidence and knowledge left a lasting impression on these young neurosurgeons from Indonesia."

With the NOF team visiting Indonesia, the neurosurgery residents expressed their thanks "With deepest gratitude to the Neurosurgery Outreach Foundation for inspiring dreams, shaping futures, and building a legacy of compassion and excellence in neurosurgery. Proud to carry your mission forward," said Astrii, Priandana, Syaichu, David, Airef, Petra, Bolly, Adhit, Lily, Richard, Andi, Edo, Christian, Erwin, Ferdinand, Sansan, Sri Arya, Azhary, Yudistira, Dicky (Indonesian Alumni of NOF).



Dr. Mohamad Dicky Hidayatullah presenting a case at neurosurgery rounds in Bandung, Indonesia.

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With deepest gratitude to the Neurosurgery Outreach Foundation for inspiring dreams, shaping futures, and building a legacy of compassion and excellence in neurosurgery. Proud to carry your mission forward.



Dr. Henok Teshome (right) with Dr. Ricardo Hanel during his observership in Florida.

Ethiopia

One of the many recipients of NOF's educational awards is Dr. Henok Teshome Molla, a native of Ethiopia, who was awarded the NOF-Trinity Love Hoblit Foundation Jacksonville Traveling Fellowship. Dr. Teshome is a senior neurosurgery resident at Addis Ababa University, College of Health.

His observership included spending time with fellow neurosurgeons and physicians at the Wolfson Children's Hospital, Baptist Health Jacksonville, and the Mayo Clinic. Of his fellowship in Jacksonville, Dr. Teshome shares: "The procedures I attended and the skills I acquired from these leading experts in neurosurgery were transformative, especially given that many were not currently performed in the 'Horn of Africa.' The invaluable lessons and advanced techniques will enable me to bridge significant gaps in neurosurgery services in Africa."

With the NOF award, Dr. Teshome hopes to realize his ultimate dream of providing sub-specialty neurosurgical services to Ethiopia and East Africa. He said, "I am profoundly grateful to the Neurosurgery Outreach Foundation and Trinity Love Hoblit Foundation for this life-changing opportunity, which has thoroughly equipped me to advance in the field of complex pediatric neurosurgery and beyond."



Dr. Wayne Gluf performing complex spine surgery with Philippine neurosurgery residents.

Teacher B from the Philippines

Perhaps there is no greater testimony to NOF's lasting impact than the people who received life-changing neurosurgical care through its dedicated team of volunteers and healthcare professionals.

Such is the story of Teacher B who lives in the southern region of the Philippines. Having taught elementary school all her life, she was looking forward to retirement when she was diagnosed with a brain aneurysm. Dr. Reynaldo Villamor at the Vicente Sotto Memorial Medical Center in Cebu told Teacher B that her aneurysm could rupture anytime and end her life. The solution was to undergo brain surgery using a new type of stent to treat aneurysm, the cost of which was so high it would wipe out all her hard-earned retirement fund. Unable to decide, she found herself praying hard, seeking answers to her life-threatening dilemma.

And what happened next was nothing short of a miracle. Dr. Villamor reached out to Dr. Aldana and learned that NOF was scheduled to go to Cebu for an ESM with world-renowned cerebrovascular neurosurgeon Dr. Ricardo Hanel as part of the team. Dr. Hanel performed an angiogram on Teacher B where a special type of flow diverter was placed to treat her aneurysm, a procedure that was taught at the ESM. Now fully recovered, Teacher B is enjoying the rest of her retirement years in Cebu.

A Toddler from Ulaanbaatar

Mongolia, with its ruggedly beautiful steppes and tundras is one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world. Half of the total population live in the capital, Ulaanbaatar.

The National Center for Maternal and Child Health (NCMCH) is the main government referral hospital in Mongolia for children and the only one that can provide comprehensive specialty pediatric care for neurosurgical patients in the capital. The medical community could hardly wait for the arrival of the NOF team from the US that was to hold an ESM at the hospital.



Little girl from Mongolia who underwent a successful surgery for hydrocephalus.

One of the cases that they needed assistance with was to treat a little girl who was suffering from hydrocephalus. Her parents, who lived more than 300 miles from Ulaanbaatar, brought their toddler for the much-needed treatment at the NCMCH. Dr. Ardagyeldi “Ardka” Burkittkhan, senior neurosurgery resident, handled their case at the hospital. The NOF that was holding an ESM at that time had brought along with them much needed neurosurgical equipment to Mongolia. The child’s surgery was successful— a ventriculoperitoneal shunt insertion was performed by a volunteer neurosurgeon from the NOF with Dr. Ardka assisting using the donated equipment they had brought to Mongolia.

This case had a lasting effect not only on the patient and her family but on Dr. Ardka as well, who decided to pursue pediatric neurosurgery and is now the only one at the NCMCH.

“We have learned so much new knowledge,” Dr. Ardka says, “new experiences from NOF doctors. It would have been impossible to improve this new field in our country without NOF’s support.” The hospital has declared its commitment to building the neurosurgery program in collaboration with NOF.

A year after the surgery, another ESM was held at Ulaanbaatar. Learning of this activity, the parents of the little girl traveled 300 miles to the capital, but this time bearing gifts from their hometown for the NOF team.

*Source: Neurosurgical Focus Volume 58 (2025): Issue 3 (Mar 2025): Global Neurosurgery

An aerial photograph of Cebu, Philippines, showing a coastal city with a large bay, several islands, and a mix of urban development and greenery. The water is a deep blue, and the sky is clear with some light clouds on the horizon.

15 Years of Giving Hope

Aerial photo of Cebu, one of the 7,641 islands of the Philippines.

By Judith Garcia-Meese

Celebrating a milestone this year, NOF has been serving underserved communities for 15 years. Established in 2010 in Jacksonville, Florida, NOF has been finding solutions to address limited access to neurosurgical care due to inadequate health infrastructure, lack of trained neurosurgeons, inability to pay for care, and insufficient education or training.

The steady growth of NOF has been attributed to its founders and volunteers who embody the advocacy and policy efforts to improve and influence the prevention and treatment of neurosurgical disease globally.

The dedication of the volunteers cannot be underestimated, some of whom have been giving their time for 10-15 years and counting. The executive team led by Executive Director, Carmina Montesa Aldana, with President and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Philipp Aldana is composed of Lindy Minosa, Treasurer, and Maria Quilon, Secretary. Together they ensure the operation of the organization runs efficiently.



Creating social media content, publishing newsletters, conducting research, and writing grants have been accomplished by volunteers. The board of directors provide guidance, advise, and tap into their network to help find resources for NOF to achieve its objectives.

Over the years, biennial fund raising events were held by ad hoc committees with board members assuming the role of honorary chairs for:

- Cena y Sangria 2011, Dr. Philipp Aldana and Carmina Montesa Aldana
- A Night for the Neurons 2013, Melanie Boree and Lisa Szymanski
- Cycle100 2014, Gary Schumacher
- Dance Matters 2015, Drs. Nathan and Kathleen Ranalli
- Une Soiree avec Margaux 2017, Dr. H. Gordon and Ruth Deen
- Filipiniana 2019, Dr. Pamela Rama and Carmina Montesa Aldana

- A Portrait of a Pastry Chef as an Artist 2021, Charu Raheja, Ph.D. and Dr. Ravi Raheja
- Around the World with NOF 2023, Dr. Stephen and Kristin Pirris
- A Thrilling Night at Bowing Oaks 2025, Bill and Lisa Barton

Giving becoming a way of life

Dr. H. Gordon Deen is a neurosurgeon and a former member of the NOF Board of Directors. He was also chair of an NOF fundraising event many years ago. Reflecting on the organization's early beginnings, he said, "We started small mission trips helping a few people. Then it became larger, helping more, and then the educational component came online. Trips to Africa and Mongolia, attracting interest from people in other parts of the country who'd want to be involved. It just became a greater organization.

People sometimes come up to me and say the world has so many problems. And I'm only one person, what can I do to help? To be part of NOF, that's how each one person can make a difference, to join an organization like this," Dr. Deen suggested.

For her part, NOF Board of Director Melanie Boree added, "There's hope because the importance of going and doing these surgeries immediately makes people's lives better, which is amazing. We give hope when we educate doctors in rural areas and give them scholarships, money or textbooks, or allow them to come here or visit other places, to learn and take all the learning back to their hometowns. I think that's pretty hopeful. It is the epitome of what hope is, and maybe when they have been given these opportunities through grants, scholarships, and educational opportunities, they will pay it forward through social awareness and pass on the knowledge to others. It's kind of a trickle-down effect."

Boree feels that giving is ultimately just doing something bigger than yourself where you focus on the needs of others. "It just gives you a different purpose. It makes you a happier person when the perspective is changed in spite of challenges."



Dr. H. Gordon Deen performing spine surgery at ESM, 2018.

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People sometimes come up to me and say the world has so many problems. And I'm only one person, what can I do to help? To be part of NOF, that's how each one person can make a difference, to join an organization like this.



Dr. Deen welcoming JTF educational awardee Dr. Manilyn Hong.

(Right) L-R Dr. Belinda Shao, Dr. Russel Sasing, and Dr. Patricia Clerkin doing surgery in Davao, Philippines. (Below) Melanie Boree visiting a local Philippine orphanage.



She added, "It redirects the focus on a bigger picture and oftentimes, it helps navigate my personal life making it better when I do things that are on a larger scale." She likens a giving lifestyle to a muscle in your body, "that builds up when you exercise or when you try to increase your memory. It's almost like working out; the more you do it, the more it becomes part of who you are."

A travel enthusiast, Boree loves to visit places and welcomes the experience that different cultures offer, especially in countries she has never visited. With her mission of giving and love of travel, she joined the ESM in Cebu in 2018, bringing her young children with her. Grateful for the opportunity, she remembers, "Carmina was gracious enough to allow me to bring my children, have them join the activities where we went to different areas and orphanages. I got to expose my children to things that I feel are important."

While talking to people in Cebu during the ESM, Boree learned that the patients' families were unsure what NOF was. Most were even terrified of the thought that their children might have to undergo surgery. Having earned her degree in psychology and a master's in social work, she put her skills and expertise into action. "They couldn't understand the financial side of the consultation and other important benefits of what we do," she said. Essentially, my educational background became the key to reaching out and making them see why and what these are all about, eventually bridging certain gaps in that way and creating rapport. Which I love to do, and which made me feel like I had a certain calling for. Once they were done with surgery, once they were in the recovery rooms, being able to assist the parents alongside the nurses became a kind of a community and service. It was really an eye-opening trip for me.

"I believe everybody should have that same opportunity everywhere in the world," she muses. "It's a huge leap of faith but you can make it possible and start somewhere feasible. NOF is more of a lifestyle. When you're part of something from the ground up, you know that it just has a lot of meaning to you."

It's personal too for Charu Raheja, Ph.D., who is also a member of NOF's Board of Directors. Having undergone brain surgery in the past, Dr. Raheja feels that she has a deeply personal connection with NOF. She shares how 10 years ago, she had a brain bleed that nearly took her life. "I faced paralysis, memory loss and the fear of never returning to the life I once knew. Thanks to incredible doctors, advanced technology and the support of my family, I recovered. But I know many others aren't as fortunate. That's why giving is about more than money—it's about providing the tools, resources, and hope that can save lives and restore dignity."

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It is the epitome of what hope is, and maybe when they have been given these opportunities through grants, scholarships, and educational opportunities, they will pay it forward through social awareness and pass on the knowledge to others. It's kind of a trickle-down effect.

I understood how critical access to care, education, and resources can be.

It's a way of living with gratitude and compassion. When we integrate generosity into our daily lives—whether by sharing time, volunteering, listening to someone's story, or offering resources—it becomes part of who we are. I've found that when you make giving a lifestyle, you don't lose; you gain purpose, joy, and community. Giving means turning my second chance at life into a mission to help others.

I also met other patients like Matthew, a 10-year-old who collapsed in his kitchen from a brain malformation. Conversations with his mother gave her hope and the strength to believe that Matthew would recover and return to school like any other child. I was drawn to NOF's mission and felt a calling to contribute my skills and experiences. It has been an honor to align my personal story with a cause that is saving lives and giving hope."



Charu Raheja, Ph.D, rallying supporters in her Florida fundraiser.

"Serving on the Board and chairing fundraising events has also been a privilege. Through these roles, I've seen firsthand how powerful a community can be when it comes together for a mission greater than itself." Dr. Raheja adds, "I had the honor of leading a fundraiser that raised over \$77,000, a true testament to teamwork, creativity, and shared purpose. Each NOF event I've joined has also been a source of inspiration—connecting with people who believe in giving back has strengthened my own commitment to service."



(L-R) Christopher Barton Lisa and Bill Barton.

Bill and Lisa Barton have been actively involved with NOF for many years. For their family, neurosurgical care is very close to their hearts, having undergone life-saving neurosurgical procedures on two different occasions: one with Bill, and the other with Lisa's son, Christopher.

Brain surgery is something Bill Barton had experienced firsthand, having spent a total of 21 days in recovery after his operation. He shares, "You have a huge lead up to the period of surgery. The procedure itself may only take two and a half hours, but you're far from done when it's finished."

With 25 years of experience at American Express, Barton's expertise lies in running big operations around the world, standardizing practices and implementing programs in multiple areas at the same time. He is a member of the NOF Board of Directors and is current chair of the upcoming fundraising event of NOF, "A Thrilling Night at Bowling Oaks."

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That's why giving is about more than money—it's about providing the tools, resources, and hope that can save lives and restore dignity.

He learned about NOF after meeting Carmina Montesa Aldana through his wife and soon after joined the board.

Barton shared their past conversations on strategic growth: "How did we think about it in a more expansive way, making it beneficial to a larger segment of the world which is tremendously underserved by neurosurgeons? How do we get the word out particularly in Southeast Asia? How would we apply it across other markets, whether it be Africa or Central Asia or other places where outreach volunteering can be done and is mostly needed?"

He felt that many would benefit, noting that few organizations are involved in neurosurgical outreach at the international level. Barton explains that NOF devotes time on developing, maintaining, and improving processes and systems that make organizational sense. Although mundane in nature, the effort pays off especially in maintaining its excellence and supporting it through its growth.

NOF's approach is in its thoroughness, application of components of diplomacy, protocols, and trusting in their systems that they put in planning ESMs and creating Program Building for a specific site. It is a "crucial skill," Barton asserts. "Now, they have a playbook in place that has been enriched from their past experiences that is also easy to replicate and even improve across different sites to be more efficient in delivering its services."

Typically, Barton explains that there are about three different things that are going on. "One is the patients themselves. Second are the technology and instruments and how these concerns need to be addressed so that you can perform the surgeries. The third component is the education that people get, the volunteers who receive the training on site." He adds that their training continues with the observerships in the United States. "You're also training them by inviting them to the US to see how it's done in advanced form, so that they can apply directly what they're being taught."

There's devices and tools to get the work done right. And there's the actual training on-site and working with people and hospitals, leaving behind an infrastructure that can be continued on whatever intervention is done." Barton feels that what NOF follows is a unique model. To this he adds, "It's a beautiful one and I wish more people knew about it. Then more people will get engaged."



(Above) Dr. Gregory Albert gently comforting a young girl in Mongolia. (Below) Mongolian families showing their appreciation to the NOF team with gifts of traditional food.



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To think that there are parents in the same scenario without access to treatments is awful and not fair, so if we can do something to save another child or another family, it's worth it to me.



Christopher Barton (left) standing beside his nurse after a successful surgery.

“The most important thing is to get the word out about NOF and about the work being done to assist children and adults, but also the work that is being done in the whole community, because so many people can be impacted for life,” expressed Barton, emphasizing the enormity of their work. “The focus is the patient, but the impact is way broader than that. Getting information about how to do that and effectively encouraging other people to do it is really the heart of what NOF is about. We don't ever want to lose sight of the fact that we're really helping individuals and communities come back to being fully productive, and that is the heart of what NOF is about. And the story of our patients should always be at the center of what NOF is doing, because that is why NOF exists,” Barton points out.

Lisa Barton's introduction to neurosurgical healthcare came through a personal and life-changing experience with her son, Christopher. In May 2016, 17-year-old Christopher suffered a fall at his school gym. As a football player, he initially assumed it was another routine injury. But this time it felt different. Sensing that it was something more serious, a family friend referred them to Dr. Philipp Aldana. An MRI revealed a ruptured pre-existing arachnoid cyst. Dr. Aldana wasted no time. Christopher was called back to Wolfson's Children's hospital where Dr. Aldana performed surgery that ultimately saved his life. Today, Christopher is fully recovered and pursuing a law degree.

“We weren't sure if he was going to make it to adulthood, to being somebody who is doing great and going to be a lawyer within the year,” Lisa Barton says with a deep sigh. “To think that there are parents in the same scenario without access to treatments is awful and not fair, so if we can do something to save another child or another family, it's worth it to me.”

Bill Barton adds, “At the heart is the story of NOF. Everywhere they have basically not only saved the child, but the whole community that was supporting that child.” The couple feels that supporting their community is important as both have been involved with philanthropic organizations, “. . . because we care what happens to our neighbors,” affirms Lisa Barton.



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The focus is the patient, but the impact is way broader than that. Getting information about how to do that and effectively encouraging other people to do it is really the heart of what NOF is about. . . And the story of our patients should always be at the center of what NOF is doing, because that is why NOF exists.



Lindy Minosa: NOF's Pioneer Volunteer

As NOF celebrates a milestone year, we shine a light on Lindy Minosa, NOF's treasurer, who joined the organization in 2010, right after it was established, making her its first volunteer.

As treasurer, Lindy oversees the financial management of NOF's funds. "Extremely reliable and professional," Carmina Montesa Aldana, NOF founder and executive director, says. "Her attention to detail and pragmatic approach towards fiscal management ensures that NOF always operates efficiently. I rely on her and trust her tremendously. Lindy is no-nonsense, practical, and thoughtful."

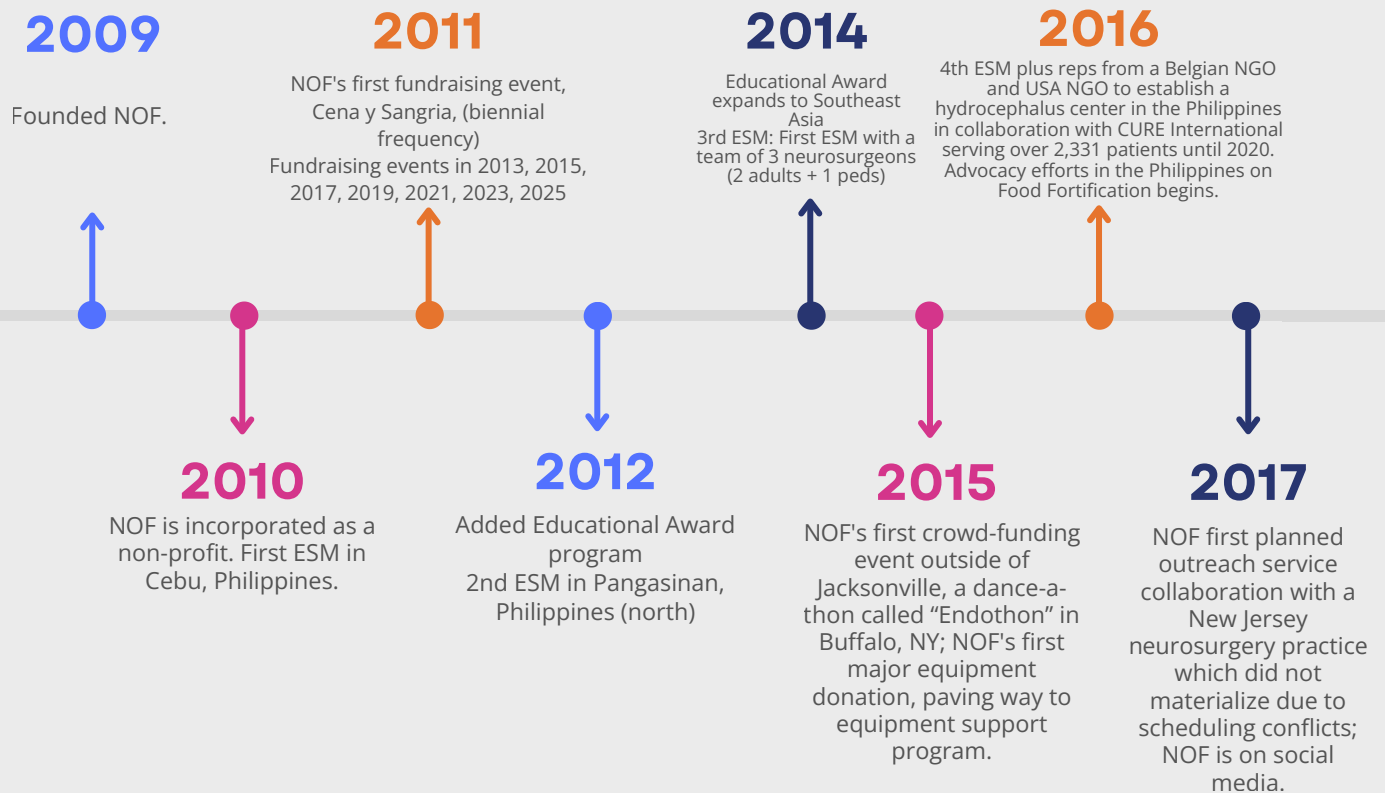
"Lindy's parents were the first to welcome us when we moved to Jacksonville. Her father and mine are college buddies and remain in touch to this day. In speaking to her about our plans to start NOF, she immediately said she'd like to help."

Maria Reina Quilon, the NOF secretary, notes that Lindy is "very good with numbers, a problem-solver, a planner. She brings her decades-long experience from the banking industry to running all financial aspects of the organization."

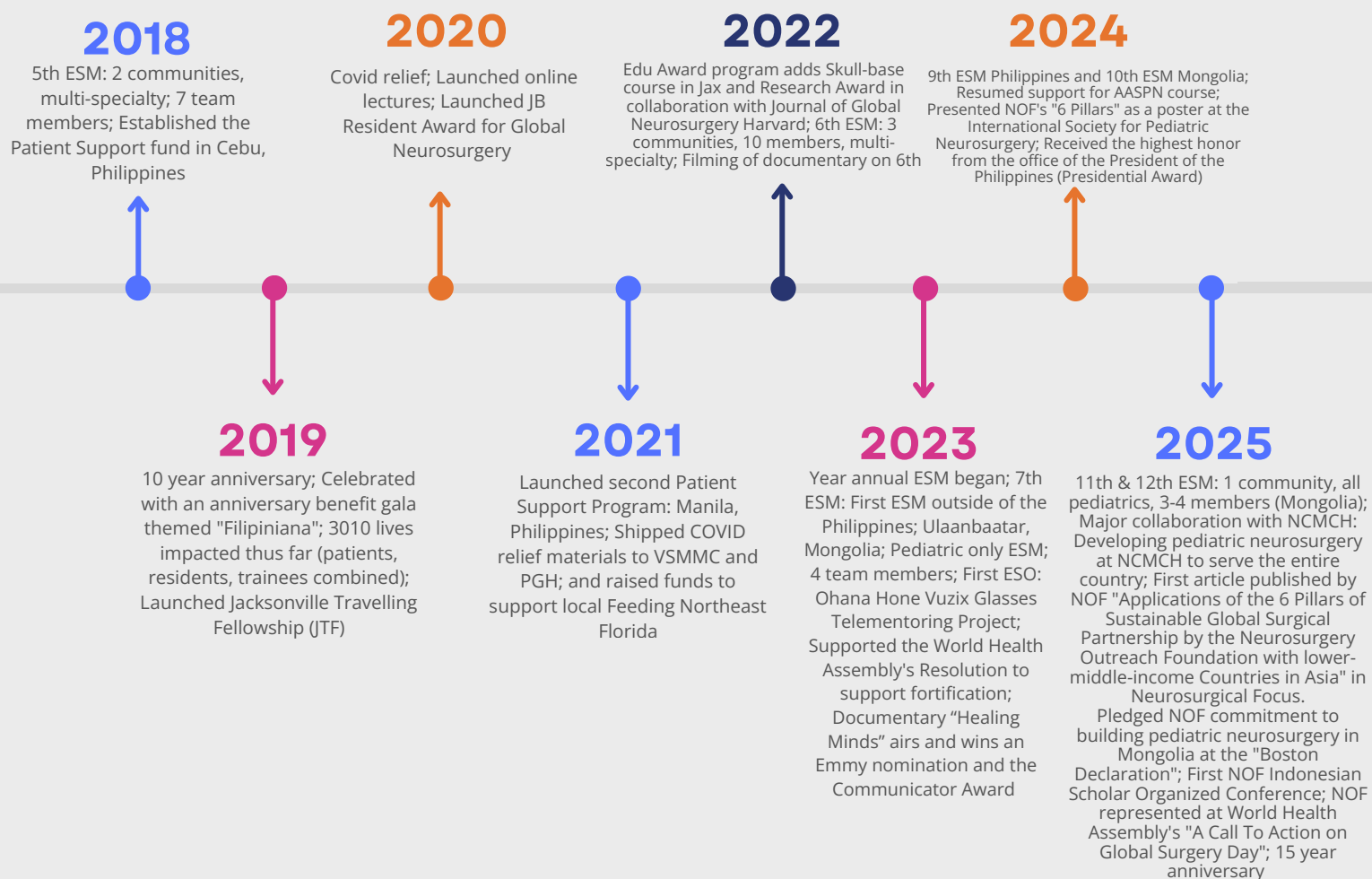
Outside of her volunteering, Lindy is a devoted daughter to her parents and a doting mom to her fur babies, Ginger and Little Boy.



Neurosurgery Outreach



h Foundation Timeline





(Above) Przewalski's horses, the last surviving true wild horses, native to the steppes of Mongolia.
(Below) The National Center for Maternal and Child Health in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.



Local Pillars: Jacksonville

By Judith Garcia-Meese

A structure is only as strong as its foundation and the pillars that uphold it. We are grateful to everyone who have stood by NOF and contributed immensely to its growth over the years. We highlight a few of these "Pillars of Jacksonville."



The iconic Main Street Bridge also known as "Blue Bridge" of Jacksonville, Florida at sunrise.



(L-R) Philip and Olivia Hoblit with their children.

Olivia and Philip Hoblit

It all started with a girl who was “small, but her words were big,” said Philip Hoblit of her daughter, Trinity Love Hoblit. Born with primordial dwarfism, Trinity just stood 29 inches tall, but her small frame belied her boundless spirit, joy, and passion for life. She touched so many lives and left a lasting impression on everyone she met that she inspired her parents, Philip and Olivia Hoblit, to establish a foundation in her name.

The Trinity Love Hoblit Foundation (TLHF) was created in 2016 to support and fund neurological research, training, and treatment for brain aneurysms, strokes, and other cerebrovascular conditions. TLHF also aims to raise awareness and educate the public about the causes, identification, diagnoses, prevention, and treatment of cerebrovascular conditions.

Trinity was diagnosed with multiple brain aneurysms. She went through a regimen of clinical treatments and was scheduled to undergo an open brain surgery to clip an aneurysm in 2015. However, two days before her pre-operative appointment, the aneurysm ruptured. Trinity passed away on June 30, 2015. She was only 14 years old.

Olivia Hoblit, Trinity’s mother, recalls that her daughter’s big heart shone through amidst all her medical treatments. With a deep sigh, Hoblit said that Trinity, “would always be praying for the kids, praying for them to get better.”

Through TLFH, many lives and non-profit organizations greatly benefit from their programs and efforts. Hoblit feels that they have really been “very fortunate working with NOF” and its program of bringing young neurosurgeons to Jacksonville to do hands-on training. “This by far is one of our favorites. Because coming in from different countries, they would learn and use that training, go back to their own countries and be able to save people’s lives.”

With Dr. Ricardo Hanel coordinating the training program, around 10 neurosurgeons from different underserved countries would undergo skull-based training sponsored by TLHF. “To be able to come back and have that training, I think, is such a huge impact,” adds Hoblit.



Trinity Love Hoblit

One of TLHF's biggest projects to date is the Florida Family Brain Aneurysm Research Project. Through Dr. Hanel and his team, the state of Florida granted TLHF over a million dollars to fund research on the genetic history of families, creating a map to find out more about families affected with cerebrovascular conditions.

"I think having this foundation and really teaching young surgeons, it's like Trinity would want people to get better, because she does not want people to go through what she's been through," said Olivia Hoblit. "She just gives us hope. We just wanted to carry it forward."



Jacqueline Dorrance-Tomlinson and Ronald Tomlinson

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Because coming in from different countries, they would learn and use that training, go back to their own countries and be able to save people's lives.

Ronald Tomlinson and Jacqueline Dorrance-Tomlinson

Couple Ronald Tomlinson and Jacqueline Dorrance-Tomlinson have been involved in the non-profit sector for decades. Jackie Dorrance-Tomlinson was the Executive Director of the Arnold and Mabel Beckman Foundation for 30 years. She continued her outreach work after retirement.

She and her husband Ron learned about NOF after he came across a news article about the Trinity Love Hoblit Foundation.

The article told the story of Olivia Hoblit and how she wanted to support the Baptist aneurysm brain research and educational awareness. He met Olivia, and "I ended up meeting with her," Jackie Dorrance-Tomlinson said. "We were very fortunate because she (Olivia) introduced us to Dr. Philipp Aldana."

The couple began to take an interest on NOF but before they decided to contribute to the foundation, Ron Tomlinson said that they "looked at the support that (it) has, the people that are running it, the financial background, educational background, and how they're doing what they want to accomplish, or what their business plan is."

They made the right decision. Jackie Dorrance-Tomlinson shares, "I think it is really very fulfilling to be able to support individuals or organizations that just need our help in some small way. And I think this is the message that should go out there to the world. You can make a difference. A lot of people don't think they can make a difference. Every little dime, every little penny, every little hour that you volunteer, any little ounce of expertise that you have, you can make a difference."



Nick and Lisa Kavalieros with their children.

Lisa Kavalieros

The Kavalieros family had a daughter, Ellie, who was diagnosed with a brain tumor in 2010, a rare type of condition known as Diffuse Intrinsic Pontine Glioma (DIPG). "When we rushed her to the hospital, she said she felt fine," recalls her mother, Lisa Kavalieros. But it turned out that Ellie was far from being fine. She battled DIPG for 19 months. Her parents had consulted with specialists and explored every possible treatment but despite their efforts, Ellie passed away on Christmas morning in 2012.

With the experience that they went through with Ellie's rare condition, the Kavalieros found themselves participating and supporting research work on DIPG. "We've been giving to the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center where our daughter participated in a vaccine trial," Kavalieros said. "We stay involved with what is going on in the world of Diffuse Intrinsic Pontine Glioma."

She confided that even with consultations, Ellie's tumor could not be resected. "She was not eligible for any type of surgery. I think that's critical and it's very important that they communicate and understand the different treatments that are out there. They help educate each other.

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Every little dime, every little penny, every little hour that you volunteer, any little ounce of expertise that you have, you can make a difference.

"When my daughter was diagnosed, they couldn't even do a biopsy. It wasn't even allowed or part of protocol, which really resonated with us. Because we didn't understand, how do you treat something if you don't know what the make-up is?"

The Kavalieros found themselves supporting trials. One that was launched in 2012 enabled physicians and skilled neurosurgeons to biopsy these tumors. "We are incredibly thankful for the neurosurgeons here in the United States that were able to do this at multiple institutions," expressed Kavalieros.



(Above) The NOF Team visiting a patient's family in Cebu. (Below) Families in Mongolia lining up for consultation.

"With that, they can see the various aberrations. It allows them to look at medicines that target these mutations. It's really changed the landscape of research on these tumors."

"We've established funds at the Dana Farber Cancer Institute at Pittsburgh and at the University of Florida in my daughter's name that targets research for the tumor type that Ellie had, which was DIPG. In our most recent event, the funds were being allocated to the University of Florida and their immunotherapy program for brain tumors using stem cell therapy and CRISPR (clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats that modifies the DNA of living organisms)."

"We believe through the research that we did, and the discussions with Dr. Philip Aldana definitely helped us navigate that world. We believe that using the immune system is critical to fighting cancer."

Kavalieros added, "We first became involved with NOF in an event on a rooftop at the museum downtown. The work that they do is incredible. We're very fortunate to be where we are in terms of medicine and be able to support treatments. What they do overseas is very moving, what they are able to do with children and families overseas who are not in the same position that we are in."





A live performance at the Saung Angklung Udjo in Bandung, Indonesia.

NOF: A Friendly Force in Global Neurosurgery

By Judith Garcia-Meese

NOF was founded in 2010 to take action to address the profound need of neurosurgical patients in the Philippines who have limited access to basic neurosurgical care.

Soon after, NOF volunteers conducted their first Educational and Surgical Mission (ESM) in Cebu, Philippines. Neurosurgeons in training received the first Educational Award to help support their training. At the time, NOF was one of the few organizations from the U.S. which was engaged in such capacity-building work in global neurosurgery.

The need to bridge the gap in global neurosurgery is immense. This was published in the landmark Global Surgery 2030 report in the journal *Lancet* in 2015. The report spurred interest in the work to address the disparities. Meanwhile, NOF continues to address this need.



Dr. Eylem Ocal (3rd from left) teaching Dr. Ardka Burkitkhan (4th from left) a ventriculoperitoneal shunt insertion procedure.



Dr. Jody Leonardo (left) demonstrating the use of an endoscope during ESM 2014.

It has expanded its outreach in underserved communities around the world, continuing to focus on the education of local neurosurgeons to treat disease and provide them the tools to do this.

While addressing the disparities in global neurosurgery through capacity-building has been at the core of NOF's work, they recognize that to expand their work, they need to train many more neurosurgeons.

Set up as a non-profit and not affiliated with any health or educational institution, NOF offers this unique opportunity for neurosurgeons to exercise their interest in global neurosurgery while addressing the disparities.

With NOF steadily making its mark in the global neurosurgery scene, Dr. Philipp Aldana says, "We are a force in the field of neurosurgery."

"Other organizations now acknowledge what we have been doing. It is not only about our outreach programs but more about collaboration. NOF has volunteer neurosurgeons who commit as leads to a site/community for a few years. This achieves a few things, such as facilitating relationship-building and promoting continuity and sustainability. We're filling in the need. Some doctors write about their experience. Our engagements build an atmosphere of friendliness in the community."

NOF has developed a collaboration model to educate young neurosurgeons in the US, to lead their own global neurosurgery initiatives that aims to build the capacity to undertake global neurosurgery by training more capacity-builders, and by providing them the tools to do so.

NOF is one of a handful organizations in the world engaged in comprehensive neurosurgery capacity-building in underserved communities. Proposed initiatives to participate in NOF's capacity building must align with its vision and mission. The belief that the foundation is a friendly force in bridging the gaps in global neurosurgery through collaboration sets up NOF to endure.

The people that make up the NOF network—neurosurgeons, healthcare professionals, executives, administrators, and volunteers—drive NOF to fulfill its mission. One of their doctor-volunteers, Dr. Patricia Quebada Clerkin, a pediatric neurosurgeon of Filipino descent, is the Medical Director of the Department of Pediatric Neurosurgery, Valley Children's Hospital in California in the US. She has taken part in two ESMs in the Philippines. "We go to the Philippines to try to help them improve their access to pediatric neurosurgical care by teaching and providing lectures," said Dr. Clerkin.

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Some doctors write about their experience. Our engagements build an atmosphere of friendliness in the community.”



Dr. Patricia Clerkin
examining a patient
in Mongolia.

"They have a significant deficiency in their ability to provide certain medical care, particularly surgical care. Being Filipino, I felt it's important that I provide that kind of service the best way I can. Not very many of us have this ability to do this kind of work and they need it there," said Dr. Clerkin. Going back to her roots and helping is also personal to her, being the first in her family to graduate with a university degree and become a doctor.

Each outreach service mission is distinct from each other, each approach of training and education is matched with the needs and capacity of the community that in turn encourages the people to develop their local resources.

"In Mongolia," shared Dr. Eylem Ocal, "we not only learned about the patients and working with their neurosurgeons, we also learned about their healthcare systems."

Throughout her career as a pediatric neurosurgeon, Dr. Ocal has participated in numerous international and local conferences, and has engaged with a wide range of organizations across different countries. "What sets NOF apart is that action is NOF's other name. We take action and we see that action into conclusion. I've been involved in professional organizations with our subspecialty, but the Neurosurgery Outreach Foundation takes action, thanks to Phil and Carmina. With the Board's guidance, we see a need and we focus on it. And after a lot of passionate, hard work, with everyone volunteering too, what we're doing is taking action."



Dr. Laura Hobart-Porter, Pediatric Physical and Medicine Rehabilitation Specialist (left) with Dr. Ocal (right) examining a young boy (middle) during his follow up appointment, Mongolia 2025.

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"We do one thing right and go to the next, then the next. Change one person's life, one patient's life, one child's life, then go to the next one. We're all very grounded and humbled by that focus that was set. That makes a huge difference, I think that's NOF's difference."

The people who run the organization are the people who work on the field at the very end, at low level as well as high level, people who work on the field directly. So, I think that makes a huge difference. I think the passion of the NOF founders, board members and leaders come out very much."



NOF team rely on local Mongolian interpreter and medical student, Erdemtugs "Tugsuu" Gantugs, (left) during a consultation with Dr. Ocal (right) in Mongolia in 2025.

"Philosophically, I think we have a broader perspective of home life, health and serving our communities. The whole concept of serving the community makes us more focused. We do one thing right and go to the next, then the next. We change one person's life, one patient's life, one child's life, then go to the next one. We're all very grounded and humbled by the focus that was set. That makes a huge difference, I think that's NOF's difference. We're just there as their guest to help them out as they need us in their communities," Dr. Ocal pointed out.

As a result, NOF has created a community of gift-givers, like a team of friends, who assist underserved communities across the world in the field of neurosurgery. It is this spirit of community-building that is encouraged and celebrated since its founding 15 years ago.



Collaborations are in NOF's future similar to one with Dr. Heather Spader on developing neurosurgical capacity in Ethiopia. Dr. Spader shares her thoughts on her partnership with NOF:

"We partnered with the Neurosurgery Outreach Foundation because it provides the infrastructure and support to make our work in Ethiopia more effective. We have been collaborating with physicians in Ethiopia for over seven years, and, while the partnerships have grown, managing equipment shipping, purchasing, and logistics is extremely challenging.

Having your own nonprofit is rarely practical, but NOF makes it possible to access the advantages of a nonprofit—such as fundraising and administrative support—without having to manage everything ourselves. This allows us to focus on training, patient care, and sustainable program growth.

Global neurosurgery depends on strong, coordinated partnerships. Organizations like NOF provide the structure, mentorship, and logistical framework that transform local collaborations into lasting impact. Their experience and infrastructure help overcome the barriers that often limit sustained growth of global neurosurgery programs."

Thank you for giving

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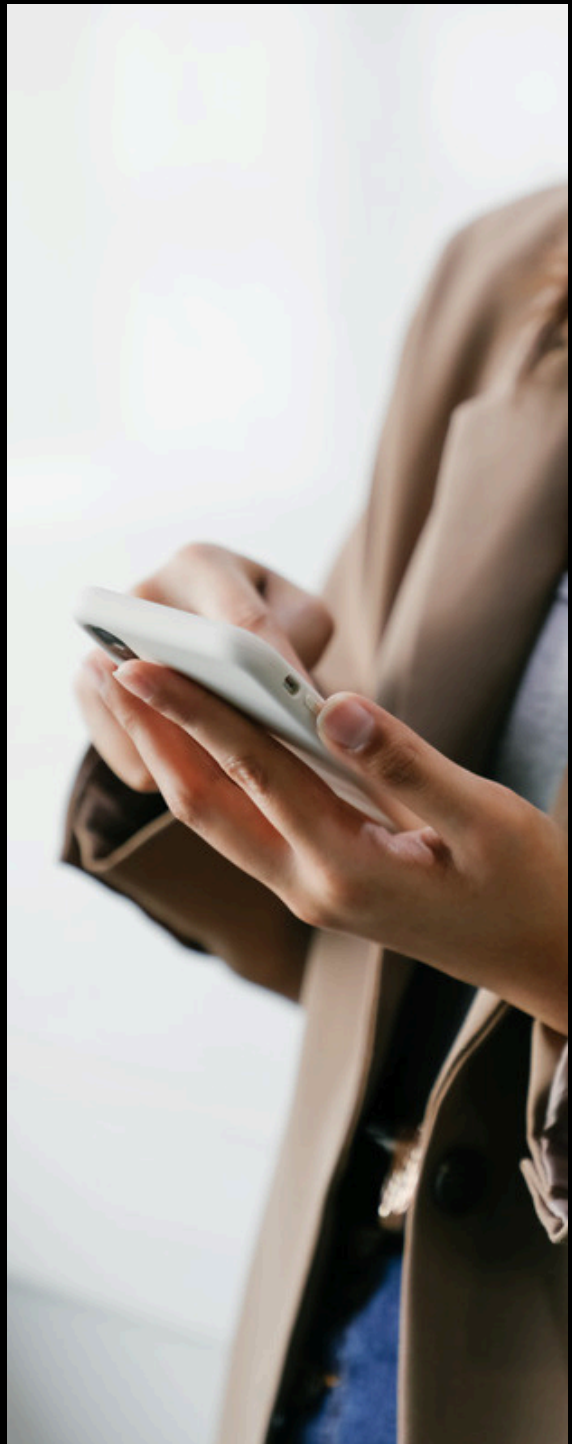
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