

“Turn what you are good at

Dr. Rapp with Dr. Grewall
(fellow GTE board member),
Mt Blanc, France





doing into doing good for others”

the story of **GIVING TO
EXTREMES**

words | SARAH COX

It may just be the perfect charity for a doctor. Giving to Extremes (givingtoextremes.org) was founded by David Rapp, MD, a urologist with Virginia Urology, just about a year ago and has been joined by three other doctors, an accountant and a lawyer for his board of directors. The premise is raising money for medical missions through the challenges of extreme activities – 5K's, marathons, Ironmans, and as is Dr. Rapp's case this June 26, an expedition up the 20,320-foot Mount McKinley in Alaska.

Giving To Extremes does several things. It raises money for medical missions that its own members go on; it supports other medical missions of non-profits, many that are too small to manage significant missions on their own; and it tells the stories of these missions and those they have helped. These accounts are found on their website.

It is a venue that can tell stories through well-put together videos that, says Dr. Rapp, bring the accounts of medical missions into the 21st century. One of the recent affects that these videos has had is inspiring others to become involved, particularly medical and undergraduate students. Dr. Rapp says this is perfect; when he was a med student at George Washington University, he didn't find much opportunity to become involved in a volunteer activity that tied into medical work, but through Giving To Extremes, students can challenge themselves physically and get involved in medical missions.

“My belief is that all you have to is go on one medical mission and that's if for the rest of your life,” says Dr. Rapp. “That's all it takes to inspire you to make this a staple in your medical career.”

Dr. Rapp has gone on several missions. He was an undergraduate Spanish major and while in med school, he traveled to Honduras and has been to Belize three times – the most recent time since the charity was founded. He says that in general, the urological issues he encounters are untreated. These are debilitating conditions such as kidney stones, bladder tumors and enlarged prostates in older men.



Dr. Rapp with Nurse Courtney Cole, operating on female patient on the GTE mission to Belize, April 2013



Dr. Rapp with patient after successful surgery to correct a fistula, Belize 2011

Dr. Rapp is a urogynecologist, so he also deals with incontinence due to prolonged deliveries in lieu of caesarians. What results are vaginal prolapses and fistulas, which is a connection between the bladder and the vagina that leaves the woman completely incontinent.

Dr. Rapp says that in Rwanda, there is an overwhelming problem with fistulas, and his organization supported the International Organization for Women and Development during its medical mission there. According to Giving To Extremes' mission statement, "Many of those affected are merely girls in their early teens, and what follows is abandonment by their families and communities. Without the prospect of work or support of their families, they face shame, divorce, isolation, depression, malnutrition, and poverty. Similarly, stricture is a common condition affecting men, which, if not surgically corrected, can result in bladder deterioration, nonfunctioning kidneys, and life-threatening urinary tract infections. The resulting emotional and social toll can be equally devastating. And these are only two of many heartbreaking -- but easily repairable -- conditions that destroy lives in developing countries."

By pairing up athletes who are willing to raise money for this organization with doctors -- many of who are the athletes -- the mission matches personalities that tend to push themselves to extremes in many ways. Dr. Rapp, who grew up an athlete playing tennis, wrestling and skiing in high school, says he was always attracted to extreme sports. He learned to scuba dive, rock climb, white water kayak and fly. "I've always been drawn to activities that required learning," he explains. He had just finished his residency and had gone to Seattle for his fellowship when a former UVA

fraternity brother who was a mountaineer got Dr. Rapp involved in this sport. At the end of the fellowship year, Dr. Rapp and his friend summited 14,411-foot Mt. Rainier in Washington State, and he started thinking that some day he would do one of the big ones.

That day has come. While Dr. Rapp says that only 40 percent of those who start summit Mt. McKinley -- also known as Denali -- he's going to give it a shot and try to raise \$1 for every 20,320 foot of the stratovolcano. The climb can take up to three weeks, and he anticipates weathering glacier melt, winds up to 100 miles per hour, and temperatures dipping to 40 degrees below zero.



David Rapp, MD on Mt. Blanc, France (15,781 ft, highest mt in western Europe)

This will make a story as compelling as the reason why he's climbing. It is as inspiring as every 5K that a doctor runs, every Ironman triathlon one goes through, and every marathon that's taken on. As a doctor, he feels that he has a great ability to help people. "You become passionate about doing this again and again," he says of the medical missions. "One of the most rewarding aspects of medicine is that there are so many people in great need, and you have been given a great gift by being fortunate enough to have the medical education offered to you in the United States."

He says it's important for those to understand that Giving To Extremes is not only a surgical mission, but also a storyteller and an educator to inspire others.



You can find Dr. Rapp's expedition page at www.givingtoextremes.org then by clicking the recent fundraisers link on the home page.



David Rapp, MD is Co-Director, Virginia Urology Center for Incontinence and Pelvic Floor Reconstruction, Assistant Clinical Professor, Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine, and President of Giving to Extremes.

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