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MILFORD

Help half a world away

Local doctor works to eradicate damaging medicine in Vietnam

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MILFORD — In Vietnam, as in many of the poorer parts of Asia, benign facial tumors are treated with a radioactive paste. The paste technically slows the tumor's growth, but not without consequences.

It leaves people, especially children, horribly scarred. The paste creates permanent red and splotchy markings. It's a practice that modern medicine has long discouraged, and it bothers Milford-based dermatologist Thanh-Nga Tran.

So much, in fact, that she set up the Vietnam Vascular Anomalies Center, a non-profit organization that provides advanced laser therapy for the tumors.

"If you've ever seen these kids with the scarring... these are young children who have to carry that for the rest of their lives, carry the result of this very wrong treatment," she said.

And this year she's getting help from her company, Kuchnir Dermatology. Since last spring, the company has been gathering money for the charity by giving patients the option of paying the cost of the procedure by donating directly to the charity.

They've raised about \$20,000, said Louis Kuchnir.

"The money is a small part of the story, but we did it here in Milford," said Kuchnir.

Indeed, Thanh-Nga works with a team of renowned doctors from around the world on the project to treat children with laser therapy and try to educate the public about why the radioactive paste is bad medical practice.

They've been at it for five years and have treated about 5,000 kids, she said. The group hopes that, through more advanced fund-raising, it can expand the effort.

Kuchnir said the fundraising success in Milford speaks to the character of the town, and also its growing appreciation as a medical hub.



Milford-based dermatologist Thanh-Nga Tran has set up the Vietnam Vascular Anomalies Center, a non-profit organization that provides advanced laser therapy for Vietnamese children with benign facial tumors. Pictured: A child with scarring from radioactive tumor treatment.
COURTESY PHOTOS

"The patients appreciate outstanding care, and they'll travel if they have to," he said. "I'm humbled by the quality of specialists in this area."

Top quality doctors from the best medical schools in the country are in Milford because they love the culture around Milford Regional Medical Center, he said.

"It's a hard-working skilled labor city," he said.

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Doctors treat a child with laser tumor treatment, a better alternative to a cream that has been used that causes severe scarring.