

Discovering Israel, the Medical Start-Up Nation

Israel is known as the start-up nation, and this is certainly evident in Israel's medical industry. On the first Doctors for Israel tour, chaired by Dr. Rob Norman and Dr. Ronna Schneider, 20 healthcare professionals from across the United States traveled to Israel to experience JNF's work and explore Israel's culture of cutting-edge medical research and innovation.

They witnessed the remarkable technology of Israel's medical start-ups, including MercyBeam, a more accurate, less harmful, and more cost-effective alternative to traditional radiotherapy and radiosurgery, and PillCam, the widely used, patient-friendly tool to detect and monitor small bowel abnormalities. The group met with one of the founders of ReWalk™, a robotics system that enables individuals with spinal cord injuries to walk. Just a week before, Dr. Jeff Brookman had fit a young military veteran with a ReWalk™.

"It was a grand experience to meet with the engineers and developers of ReWalk™ while in Israel," said Dr. Brookman. "I was honored to work with one of ReWalk™'s first American patients, and I was beyond fulfilled as a doctor to see this proud young wounded warrior standing eye to eye with everyone as he received a hero's medal. ReWalk™ offers new hope and new meaning to the lives of thousands of spinal cord patients."

A visit to the newly opened Central Arava Medical Center in Sapir, built by JNF, energized the group about the need for a similar medical center for Halutza to provide the necessary sophisticated level of care for its growing community and motivated a number of the participants to make a group gift to this proposed project.

"I was delighted to see the new Central Arava Medical Center in person," said Dr. Norman, National Doctors for Israel Chair. "Once we saw this dream come true, it was easier to grasp the vision for the medical center in Halutza. For Halutza residents a proper medical center would cut down the average travel time from over two hours to minutes. It is a privilege to know that we can help in the pioneering efforts for our family in Israel."

A start-up panel of Israeli innovators addressed the question of Israel's success in breeding so much innovation and valuable research. The case of Israeli medical innovation is exactly what drew Dr. Bill Bilek and his wife Jeni to choose the trip: Dr. Bilek is considering writing a book on Israel and medicine which focuses on why Israel is such a cutting-edge place for medical innovation and development and wanted to do some research.

"Jeni and I were most impressed by the day spent in the Arava and Be'er Sheva," he said. "We were blown away by the level of research being done in the middle of nowhere. It motivated us to think about what else there is that can be done to keep the ball rolling."

Many of the healthcare professionals plan to collaborate and build partnerships with the start-ups and their counterparts that they met at Nefesh B'Nefesh headquarters, including five doctors who made aliyah. The participants left the trip inspired to do more and to help support the work of Israel's innovators and doctors. The feeling was mutual.



"It was our pleasure to host the JNF Doctors for Israel tour to Israel," said Ze'ev Harel, CEO of Convergent R.N.R. Ltd. "Until recently we did our best to run under the radar of the giant market players. JNF's visit was the first time we actually spoke to the outer-world about our project and their interest and enthusiasm was very encouraging."

The success of the Doctors for Israel tour showed that the importance of bringing together like-minded professionals to showcase the innovation shaping Israel and the world we know. JNF hopes to replicate this model with other shared professional groups, starting with the first-ever Law and Justice Tour November 15 - 19th, 2015.

For more information on JNF's tours, visit jnf.org/travel