

April Speaker

Rahul Singh, *GlobalMedic*

“Innovation” is how GlobalMedic does “more with less,” Rahul, executive director of Toronto-based GlobalMedic, told us. He founded the disaster relief and humanitarian charity in 1998 because he was “pissed off” at charitable organizations that fritter away money on themselves which should go to the needy. For instance: “In flood areas sandbagging machines improve efficiency over manual labour. They cost \$50,000 to \$60,000 retail; a government would pay that because it lacks innovative thinking. I paid a fraction of that, \$8,000. All I did was looking up the internet. I found what I wanted listed at an auction in Texas.” For his innovative, outside-the-box approach Rahul has been called a “superhero” by *Toronto Life* and named one of the world’s most influential people by *Time* and the *Globe and Mail*.

GlobalMedic is the operational wing of the David McAntony Gibson Foundation, a registered Canadian charity named by Rahul in honour of a friend who died. A paramedic, Rahul was a professional emergency worker for 10 years before he started GlobalMedic.

“Think of a triangle,” he said when a member asked GlobalMedic’s destination criteria. “Need is at the apex; raising necessary funding at the left corner, and access at the right.” In its 25 years he says the organization has provided relief in 249 emergencies to 4.5 million people in 82 countries. “Our goal is to get the right aid to the right people at the right time,” he says. He told us how angered he was that the director of a charity which was supposed to help a Nepalese community recover from a mudslide bought him a \$32 pepper steak at a recruitment interview. He turned down the job and it motivated him to start GlobalMedic to provide “the maximum amount of aid at a minimum operating cost.”

Clean water is its top priority. “Waterborne diseases are a major problem. Drugs are just temporary help. Clean water is better than medicine.” Next, food. GlobalMedic received an innovation grant from Google for its innovative drone food deliveries. Rahul is dynamic and persuasive and obtains free airlifts and trucking. GlobalMedic also provides medical aid in the form of pop-up hospitals and trauma and hygiene kits.

Donations have grown over the years but at \$10 million currently GlobalMedic’s finances are modest compared to bigger charities. It minimizes costs by relying on volunteers, now numbering 7,000 around the world from all walks of life. “Every board member, including me, started as a volunteer.” The volunteers include paramedics, firefighters, and police officers who donate their time. A member suggested that teens looking for volunteer hours would be a good resource to pack supplies.

Currently GlobalMedic is focusing considerably on Ukraine. It has five distribution bases. Innovation is the byword here too. Rahul persuaded restaurants and hotels to supply food to the needy. Supplies are bought in bulk for leverage in getting reduced prices. Instruction on how to use trauma bags and stop bleeding is provided via cell phone video instruction. “Cell phones are recharged at train stations,” he explained.

“The trend worldwide for needing assistance is way up. It will continue to rise largely because of angry young men with guns. Of the 339 million people who need assistance and protection, 100 million have been forcibly displaced by violence, a big increase since the 60 million a decade ago. Climate change is another factor. The number of climate-related disasters has almost tripled in the current decade. No government is coming to bail out and the amount of money received by charities is plateauing.”

Canada has problems too, he said. “Four times as many people are accessing food banks than four years ago. One-third of food bank users are children although they constitute only one-fifth of the population. One-third of Canadian households live in inadequate, unsuitable, or unaffordable homes.”

Susan Goldenberg