

# Employee News

## UCLA Team Eliminates the Sound of Silence in Armenia

The greatest gifts don't always come wrapped in a big, red bow. Instead, they come straight from the heart. So it is with an ongoing medical mission in the Republic of Armenia that has changed so many lives with priceless gifts of hearing.

It all began in 1999 when an Armenian doctor contacted Salpy Akaragian, RN-BC, MN, FIAN and director of UCLA's International Nursing Center, to consult about a child with hearing loss caused by an overdose of antibiotics. Akaragian, of Armenian descent, then reached out to her colleagues, including Akira Ishiyama, MD, UCLA head and neck surgeon, to discuss the situation and its implications.

They knew the child could benefit from cochlear implants not yet available in Armenia. Cochlear implants cannot fully restore hearing, but these complex electronic devices do provide a sense of sound.

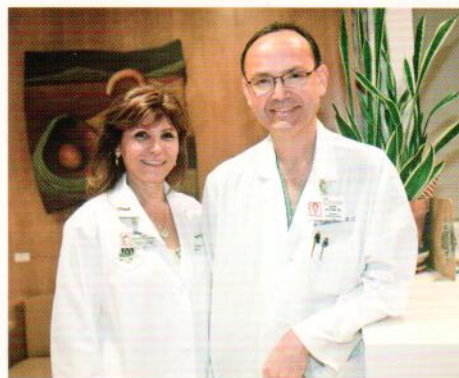
Although that child went to Europe for treatment, his plight inspired productive conversations between doctors in Armenia and at UCLA. Next, the Armenian government lent its support and as a result of the entire collaboration, the Armenian International Medical Fund formed in 2003. Two Armenian doctors — a surgeon and audiologist — came to UCLA to train with

Dr. Ishiyama. By year's end, a cochlear implant program was established at Erebouni Medical Center in Armenia.

In March 2004, a team including Dr. Ishiyama and Akaragian performed Armenia's first implant surgeries on three young children. Since then, together with other healthcare professionals, Dr. Ishiyama has completed 14 trips and 76 cochlear implant procedures. The first two Armenian doctors have now had multiple visits to UCLA to further hone implant skills, and more are receiving training by UCLA specialists.

Although Dr. Ishiyama and his colleagues receive no financial compensation for their services, "payment" comes in other ways.

"When we do surgery, entire extended families, always so grateful, wait outside the OR for us to come out," he says. "We don't speak their language, but we don't have to. Their eyes say it all."



Salpy Akaragian (left) and Dr. Akira Ishiyama