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Eastside Doctor went home to help with tsunami relief

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Dr. Sumathy Pathy has seen her share of trauma.

The Bellevue-based family practitioner endured years of civil war in her home country of Sri Lanka and survived medical school there through bouts of bombings and gunfire. But for some reason, it's the 15-year-old boy from the tsunami she can't get out of her mind now.

Pathy met him during her two-week trip this month to Sri Lanka on a volunteer journey to provide medical help to the victims devastated by the waves. When she thinks of him, she sees an orphaned and malnourished teenager, looking like an 8-year-old, depression sinking in his eyes. "It's your people and they are suffering," said Pathy, who returned to the United States this week. "It's just horrible."

Pathy, 37, joined five doctors from the International Medical Health Organization, a Maryland-based nonprofit helping with relief efforts in Sri Lanka, an island nation off the southeastern tip of India.

The Dec. 26 disaster killed more than 200,000 people across Asia and left millions more homeless. More than 30,000 of Sri Lanka's 19 million people died and more than 390,000 were displaced.

Arriving in Sri Lanka on Jan. 9, the physicians traveled to Batticaloa, about 200 miles east of Colombo, to help those along Sri Lanka's battered East Coast.

Dilapidated school buildings were turned into medical camps, Pathy said. Victims convalesced on mats with flies and mosquitoes buzzing overhead. Rainwater poured in from above as the injured lined up for care, waiting to be sutured and bandaged.