



SPP leverages civilian partnerships to boost medics' combat readiness



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Story by Lt. Col. Agneta Murnan

New Jersey National Guard

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Medical personnel from the New Jersey Army National Guard and the Albanian Armed Forces traveled to Chicago this month for an advanced trauma training course offered by the Rush University Medical Center September 3-12, 2025.

The Rush International Advance Trauma Training Course and Medical Exchange Event was designed to give medical response members state-of-the-art knowledge and hands-on skills required to provide advanced acute management for trauma patients in combat environments and domestic incidents.

“I was privileged to observe the incredible trauma training that our National Guard Soldiers, Airmen and State Partnership Program colleagues are receiving at Rush University Medical Center,” said U.S. Army

Maj. Gen. Lisa J. Hou, D.O., director of the National Guard Bureau Office of the Joint Surgeon General and a combat surgeon herself during the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. “Trauma training, such as this, is crucial to maintaining the combat readiness of our medical personnel to ensure the best possible care for our combat warriors.”

The course featured hands-on experience with cadavers and live tissue, as well as a mass casualty exercise at the conclusion of the course. Military medical personnel must be able to rapidly respond to worst-case scenarios in difficult conditions.

“That training is immeasurably valuable for medics and providers alike,” said Specialist Amandeep S. Baghiana, Combat Medic, 2-113th Headquarters Company, 44th Division. “We get an intimate knowledge of the human body, the interventions that we use to save lives, and the technological and medical breakthroughs that have changed how we do medicine.”

AAF Lt. Col. Mariela Mjeda, staff officer for Health Planning, Health Inspectorate, General Staff of the AAF, traveled overseas with several of her Albanian medical colleagues to Chicago to participate in the course. Mjeda is a military registered nurse with six years of study at the Military Academy of Nursing Officers located in Athens, Greece.

“The knowledge and skills we gain here are essential for improving trauma care and readiness in complex environments. For myself and my colleagues in Albania, the lessons we bring home will strengthen our ability to respond to emergencies, save lives, and train others within our Armed Forces and medical system,” said Mjeda. “It is more than training—it is an exchange of experience, values and trust that contributes to stronger bonds between our nations and a safer future for all. To Dr. Ted Corbin and the Rush Department of Emergency Medicine, along with all the instructors, thank you for sharing your knowledge, experience and passion for saving lives.”

Over the span of three years, National Guard medical service members from across the country and nine partner countries have participated in the course, which includes trauma and infectious disease training curricula.

“This is truly an excellent opportunity to continue to develop the cooperative security commitments and alliances between the National Guard states and their State Partnership Program nations,” said retired U.S. Army Col. David Leckrone, senior military advisor to the Rush Advanced Trauma Training Program.

Through SPP, the National Guard conducts military-to-military engagements in support of defense security goals but also leverages whole-of-society relationships and capabilities to facilitate broader interagency and corollary engagements spanning military, government, economic and social spheres.

The SPP is administered by the National Guard Bureau, guided by State Department foreign policy goals, and executed by the state adjutants general in support of combatant commander and U.S. Chief of Mission security cooperation objectives and Department of War policy goals.

“Being able to send our Soldiers, Airmen and SPP counterparts to courses like this accomplishes multiple objectives,” said Stephen Cosmanic, Health Systems Specialist for the NJNG’s Joint Surgeon’s Office. “It not only increases our training to save lives, it enhances our critical military partnerships around the world.”

The State Partnership Program has been successfully building relations for more than 30 years and now includes 106 partnerships with 115 nations around the globe.

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