

# Truth and Justice

"I can't say I understood 'injustice' at age 10, but I knew something wasn't fair," Rajesh Panjabi, SPH '06, says. "Liberia gave birth to my conscience. At Hopkins, I found the courage to return."

In 1990 Raj and his family were evacuated from Liberia as civil war convulsed the nation. The Panjabis lost everything but resettled in the United States and eventually rebuilt their lives. However, the faces of those left behind—blocked at the airport by soldiers—stayed with Raj and helped direct his path toward medicine and, ultimately, public health.

Raj, a physician who earned his Master of Public Health in 2006 and was one of the first **Sommer Scholars** at the **Bloomberg School of Public Health**. Named in honor of Dean Emeritus Alfred Sommer, the program provides tuition and research support for Master of Public Health and Doctor of Philosophy students, funding that allowed Raj to return in 2005 to Liberia.

His research explored how social problems like war and poverty manifest as illness. But Raj wasn't there only to observe, and he put his skills as a physician to use in a rural clinic—skills desperately needed in a country with more than three million people and just 51 doctors.

His experience in southeastern Liberia inspired him to found a local non-governmental organization, **Tiyatien Health**. The name means "truth and justice" in the Krahn dialect—an acknowledgment of the importance of community involvement and a statement connecting health with economic and social empowerment.

"Our goal is to treat problems holistically, not just medically," says Raj. Tiyatien Health runs a hospital in partnership with the Liberian government and trains community-based health care workers, who provide care for people too sick or too remote to reach the clinic. This model has created jobs, improved access to health care, and built a level of trust that is vital as the Liberian society rebuilds.

In 2007 Tiyatien was the first rural group approved for the distribution of anti-retroviral therapies—a critical first step toward providing much-needed AIDS care outside the capital and a victory for the community-based care model. The group is now working to rebuild rural infrastructure through community health centers.

"There is a long way to go in addressing the problems Liberia faces, but we can offer people hope because they are part of the solution. And they can see the results."



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