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### **Fargo cancer specialist gets out of Lebanon safely**

DAVE KOLPACK Associated Press

FARGO, N.D. -Dr. Nicolas Zouain was back at work at the MeritCare Roger Maris Cancer Center on Wednesday, more than three weeks after he left for a family reunion and found himself trapped in Lebanon as war broke out.

Zouain, 32, a radiation oncologist, said he began to worry about his patients. His colleagues at MeritCare began to worry about him.

MeritCare officials said Zouain is working on a visa waiver and is a permanent resident of Canada. They asked sen. Kent Conrad's office for help in getting Zouain out of Lebanon.

He was among thousands who suddenly found themselves in a war zone. Officials said more than 14,000 Americans had been evacuated since fighting erupted between Israel and Hezbollah guerrillas on July 12.

Zouain said he left Fargo on July 7 for a family reunion at a Lebanese beach resort, and he had been out late the night before the attacks started.

"I was the last one to know the war started," he said.

July is a heavy tourist season in Lebanon, Zouain said, and an estimated 1.5 million tourists were trying to escape the war. He found the airport and the sea port shut down. He grew more worried as the days passed and he saw no signs that the country would return to normal.

"I really started to worry about my patients, that I wouldn't get home in time," Zouain said.

In the meantime, he said, he helped treat people who were injured in the attacks, he said. The American embassy became so full that he could not get in. His cell phone went dead so he went to Internet cafes to check e-mails.

Conrad, D-N.D., said he and his *staff* negotiated with the U.S. State Department, the Defense Department and the embassies of Canada and Norway. Zouain told officials he lived in an area where doctors were scarce.

Conrad said Zouain was on one list, then was told he was not on the list. Conrad said he and his *staff* contacted diplomats as well as personal friends to help.

After hours of background checks, Zouain finally was taken by bus to Beirut and then got on a U.s.-operated ship to Cyprus on Sunday. He flew to Philadelphia on Tuesday and then to Minneapolis, and was back in Fargo on Tuesday night, and back at work the next morning.

"I went home, crashed, woke up this morning and went to the hospital," he said.

Zouain said his relatives are safe, but he had mixed feelings about leaving Lebanon because others there were hurting. "I'm sad I'm leaving, yet happy I'm leaving," he said.

Dr. John Leitch, the medical director at the Maris Center, said Zouain has served 250 patients since last October . "He has provided wonderful service with his expertise," Leitch said. "We're grateful for his safe return." Leitch called it an "amazing few days."