



ADVANCE PHOTO/FRANK J. JOHNS

Dr. Edmund Gergerian talks about his mission of mercy to the city of Kirovakan in Soviet Armenia.

In between transitional days in Moscow, Dr. Gergerian saw 95 patients in Kirovakan, and treated them through supportive counseling, play therapy, medication and behavior modification.

"My adrenalin was very high. I really was there to work," he said. "I'm exhausted, honestly."

The Soviet chief psychiatrist in Kirovakan serves almost 500,000 in the area with a small staff. Medications are in short supply, and techniques well known in the West, such as group therapy, have been introduced to Armenians by the U.S. teams.

"To encourage (people) to express and cry has been one of the

main tasks of the team," said Gergerian. "There is a strong sense of denial. Crying is discouraged" in the culture.

The teams have also focused on helping the helpers: treating medical personnel, mental health workers, teachers and politicians so that they are able to help others.

The Armenian government paid for his accommodations, and the Soviet government has processed visas quickly, eager to assist visitors who come to help.

"Within 24 hours, the entire population knew about my arrival" in Kirovakan, said Gergerian. "I was greeted like a god. I mean it. Anybody from the outside is greeted with full honors. Since Gorbachev has opened the doors to the Soviet Union, the outpouring of help has stunned them."

Most of the international help

has been geared toward food, medicine and reconstruction. Mental health efforts, still considered a luxury, have been slow in coming. But Gergerian hopes he and his fellow volunteers have helped establish a base for continuing Soviet, as well as international, services.

"This is an issue that has to be dealt with on a long-term basis," he noted.

He would like to return to Armenia later this year for another intensive round of treatments. But Gergerian is satisfied that his short time there was helpful.

"Besides the practical work I did there, morally, the support of someone coming from the U.S.A. to help them out, or just talk . . . it raises their spirits. Even if you're not a physician, your presence shows them the world has not forgotten them."