

International Healthcare Volunteers

Newsletter, Winter 2015

2014 Ghana Medical Mission



Volunteers of the 13th Annual Ghana Medical Mission at Kotoka International Airport, in Accra, Ghana, West Africa.



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13th Annual Ghana Medical Mission!

IHCV completed its thirteenth medical mission to Ghana, West Africa, this past August. The mission took 27 volunteers to La General Hospital in Accra, Central Regional Hospital in Cape Coast, and KNUST University Hospital. Working with our Ghanaian health professional colleagues, IHCV volunteers cared for 381 patients, performing 107 major procedures and providing outpatient care for 274 patients over 10 working days.

The focus on education and training of both Ghanaian and IHCV medical students and residents grows with each medical mission. This year, the IHCV volunteers attended and presented at grand rounds and conferences for

continuing medical education on topics including maternal health, urinary incontinence in women, and multiple gestation. Approximately 20.5 hours of CME were provided and 87 outreach encounters.

IHCV continues to cultivate its clinical and academic relationships in Ghana to maintain its cervical cancer, colon cancer, and HIV screening programs.

As in previous years, IHCV volunteers benefit and learn from our Ghanaian colleagues and patients valuable lessons and skills that will surely enhance their lives and medical practice in the US. We look forward to returning in 2015.

About IHCV

International Healthcare Volunteers began in 2001 after Dr. James Aikins lost a family member to postpartum hemorrhage in Ghana. Frustrated with the thought of losing someone to a condition which is very treatable in the US, Dr. Aikins and his wife, Dr. Charletta Ayers established IHCV with the mission of providing healthcare to women in underserved areas and providing continuing medical education to healthcare professionals in these areas. The first mission occurred in August 2001. IHCV has done a medical mission every

year since its inception. Over the last 13 years, IHCV has expanded its scope to include women, men, and children. Since our debut mission, IHCV volunteers have cared for nearly 10,000 patients. In addition to medical care, IHCV engages in medical education, attending and presenting at conferences and grand rounds during missions, offering continuing medical education credits for health providers. Educational exchange continues to be the crux of IHCV's sustainability. We look forward to medical missions for years to



~~~~~ Medical Mission Volunteer Reflections ~~~~~

Amy Amuquandoh, Junior Volunteer



Having been in Ghana for most of the summer, I met the IHCV group at the airport in Accra. Upon meeting the members of the La General Hospital, Accra team, I couldn't help but wonder about week ahead since we were only four people! The team consisted of a medical researcher, a surgical doctor, a

surgical resident, and me, the Junior Volunteer. It turns out that we all "gelled" really well, and that I would have the most exciting experiences of my summer, yet.

On our first day at the hospital, we met the staff and got acclimated to the hospital environment. We unpacked and organized all of our supplies and then evaluated the patients that were to have surgery over the next couple of days. I was most surprised by the amount of time that the patients had been waiting to get their surgeries done; many people had been waiting in the hospital 3 or 4 days for major hernia surgeries. In the days following, I put on my scrubs and watched surgeries being performed in the theatre (operating) room. I helped out where I could and often times found myself acting as a translator to my team members, as I had become accustomed to the Ghanaian



Amy and Dr. Lee

accent over the previous months. Observing the surgeries was very rewarding, as I had never seen human abdominal organs in person. I gained a lot of respect for the surgeons, seeing their medical knowledge and their composure during procedures.

The most rewarding part of my experience was not only interacting with the patients, before and after the surgeries, but mostly with the doctors and nurses of the hospital.

The media inundates us with images of sick and poverty-stricken African children, and in the midst we may forget that there are competent and professional medical personnel available in these countries. Getting to know the doctors on a personal and professional level was a good reminder that we were not there to be the Western medical volunteer saviors, a common narrative, but to aid and assist a capable medical staff. I am still in touch with some of the staff through Whatsapp (a great app!) and hope to maintain their friendship and network.

Overall, the program was very rewarding for me in terms of getting the global health experience I sought for. I advise future Junior Volunteers to make the best of their trip by being aware of the mindset that they have before entering trip, and open themselves up to conversations.

Karen Kilsdonk, Senior Volunteer

I heard about IHCV through working with Dr. Aikins and Dr. Marcia Hernandez. I work for a company that has a test for cancer patients receiving chemotherapy and Dr. Aikins utilizes this test as a tool to treat his patients. They were talking about previous trips one day, and they said they could use someone like me – even though I was not a nurse or a doctor. I feel very blessed in life, and going to Ghana to help those in need sounded like a perfect way to give back for all my good fortune.

I was assigned to La General Hospital in Accra with Dr. Lee, Dr. Christina Cheng, Amy Amuquandoh, and later, physician assistant, Shurika Perry came to provide an extra set of much needed hands. My first impression of the hospital conditions was not positive. There is no running water, and the basics we take for granted here in the US do not exist. La General made the national news for the high number of patients with cholera; some had died. Anastasia, head OR nurse (known as "Sister") and Timothy (nurse anesthetist) were extremely critical in helping to organize the surgeries. Drs. Lee and Cheng were great at taking less than optimal conditions and making the patient outcomes extremely positive. My job was to assist Drs. Lee and Cheng in any way possible – paperwork, consent forms, running to the supply room, etc.

The patients we saw were all very kind and had extreme patience waiting for their surgeries. They sat on hard plastic chairs in the hallway waiting for their turn. Knowing how impatient, selfish and self-absorbed we all can be at times in our daily lives here in the US – it brought it back to what is important. I was also moved while at church on the weekend when the parishioners were so happy to give during the multiple collections for money, those with very little giving to those with even less.

Advice for those going to Ghana in the future: It's a truly amazing experience. You will take away far more than anything you give. Be flexible and willing to pitch in and experience new things. The people are wonderful. IHCV keeps everyone safe and well organized while you are there. The people that have done multiple trips are good resources to help the rookie people like myself. It will be one of the best experiences of your life.

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far more than
anything you give.
Be flexible and
willing to pitch in
and experience
new things.**



2014 Mission Volunteers

ACCRA TEAM

Christina Cheng, MD
Margaret Lee, MD
Amy Amuquandoh
Karen L. Kilsdank

CAPE COAST TEAM

Charletta Ayers, MD
Ricardo Caraballo, MD
Stacy Carr
Brenda Mitchell
Sherese Phillips
Arnelle Midley
Ifeoma Anidi
Maher Aami, MD
Jennifer Frimpong
Marcia Hernandez
Rebecca Mattingly
Aisha Rahman
Isabella Nyan

KUMASI TEAM

James Aikins, MD
Nii Daako Darko, DO
Renee Volny Darko, DO
Shurika Perry, PA-C
Juana Hutchinson, MD
Annette V. Wagner, MD
Brianne Mitchell, MD
Deneen Clemons, RN
Mahathi Komaragiri, MD
Monica Bauer

Monica Bauer, 4th year medical student



I heard about IHCV during my first year of medical school at Robert Wood Johnson through a newsletter from one of our favorite priests, Father Anthony. In the newsletter he talked about his amazing trip to Ghana through IHCV. I looked the organization up online and realized the trip was open to medical students. When I entered my fourth year of medical school, I was accepted for the 2014 medical mission to Ghana, and I was thrilled.

I was stationed at a small, quiet hospital on the beautiful campus of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, which is located in the bustling town of Kumasi. My team consisted of two OB/GYNs, a urogynecologist, trauma surgeon, nurse, physician assistant, and internal medicine resident. As the medical student, I was given the opportunity to scrub-in on multiple operations and evaluate post-op patients in the wards.

One of my most profound memories from this medical mission was when a woman came to the hospital with unstable vital signs. The Ghanaian general surgeon worked with the IHCV surgeon and the two GYNs in a huge

operation for what was a ruptured ectopic pregnancy, even though her pregnancy test was negative! After several days in the hospital, she did great! This reminded me of the common goal that all doctors and nurses share, no matter from what part of the world they are.

There was a cultural exchange as they taught us about Ghanaian history and tradition, but there was also an exchange of expertise and knowledge. They taught us different surgical techniques and how to work with fewer resources, including power outages or when the water stops running. We gave lectures to the residents on topics such as urinary incontinence and twin pregnancies, so we hope they learned something from us too!

I feel truly blessed to have been able to go on this medical mission. I loved working with the IHCV medical team and I am inspired by the tremendous amount of time and energy put in to making this trip possible every year. This may have been my first medical mission, but I know it will not be my last. My experience is one that I will take with me for the rest of my life and remember always.

2014 Mission Photo Album





Annual IHCV Fundraiser

Gala & Dinner Dance

Save the Date
Date: April 25, 2015



SAVE THE DATE: 2015 Ghana Mission dates are July 24 – August 9.

If you know someone who would be a great fit for the mission, please share this newsletter.

Applications are available at www.ihcv.org. Deadline for applications is February 23, 2015.



Thank you to our donors!

Our medical missions are made possible entirely by the work of our volunteers and supporters of our fundraising campaigns and gala. We thank you for your generosity and hope to have your continued support in years to come!

Winter greetings from IHCV!

