



The title of our newsletter we've used for the last three plus years has turned out to be prophetic. Although the ship is currently docked in Tema, Ghana, about which I will share with you later in this newsletter, my first need for communication concerns the country of Liberia, where we served with the ship for almost a full year with the ship. We apologize for taking for granted that most of you know about our plans and not putting out a formal announcement and a thorough explanation until now.

God has given us a vision to establish a dental clinic in Liberia. While in Liberia for nearly one year in 2005-6, patient after patient made their way to our dental clinic with problems they could not have treated anywhere—literally. The need of the country slowly tugged at our hearts. The vision came to provide a dental clinic and surgery center for people who suffer from jaw fractures, severe infections, osteomyelitis, cysts, small benign tumors, and, God willing, even cleft lips—all of these are people that have no where else to go. We want to serve all those who “fall in between the cracks”. But as a volunteer doctor said when I shared this, “In Liberia, everyone falls in between the cracks”.

Therefore, patients will also receive basic dental care and education.

Info on Liberia

- www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/li.html
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberia>
- www.liberian-connection.com/
- www.africa.upenn.edu/Country_Specific/Liberia.html

Memories still linger from Liberia of James, who sat in the government hospital for six weeks with a fractured jaw and received no treatment. And also a seven year old boy who went from clinic to clinic for 3 days until he ended up at our clinic with the worst jaw fracture I've ever seen. I thank God that for the last three years here on the ship I have had the huge blessing and privilege to gain experience with Mercy Ships, training under Dr. Gary Parker. Dr. Gary has almost twenty years experience in West Africa as a maxillo-facial

surgeon, and has helped prepare me for some of the need that waits in Liberia. But even the simple dental needs of the people are reason enough, as there are currently only three dentists to Liberia's 3.5 million people.

A few years ago, Rene Lako, director of Mercy Ships, Sierra Leone, visited the ship. He was into his first year at the new VVF clinic established by Mercy Ships. He explained that the clinic could function for an entire year on the cost of a dry dock for the ship (not to criticize the ship, for what it does in West Africa is unparalleled and could not be accomplished any other way). But for some reason, at that point, God planted the seed in my mind that would lead to this point. Kristin and I see ourselves doing what we do with Mercy Ships, but on an ongoing basis in one location; developing more continuity in the dental treatment and services offered. At the same time, we believe that by immersing ourselves in and devoting ourselves to the culture of one area, it will allow us to minister to the people more effectively in every aspect of what we do.

It also turns out that Liberia has also captured the heart of Frieda Schmidt, a dental therapist from Canada and ex-Mercy Shipper with whom I have worked. Frieda will be a co-founder of the clinic with us and has a long term goal of establishing a dental therapy school there as well.

The clinic will operate very similarly to the Mercy Ships land based clinic in which I've worked for the last three years and we hope to have short term volunteers as we do with Mercy Ships. Dentists, hygienists, and hopefully oral surgeons will come and serve with us for two weeks to several months at a time. We also hope to establish satellite clinics in different areas of the country, which is about the size of the state of Oregon, to reach people who cannot afford transportation and screen for larger problems that can be treated at the main facility.

Let His work begin...

Unfortunately, when we presented the vision to Mercy Ships for consideration, our programs director explained how Mercy Ships could not help with such a project at this time since their focus and efforts are so concentrated right now on the

newest ship, the Africa Mercy. But while Kristin was in London visiting friends on her way back from the U.S. this summer, we

had what seems to be our biggest breakthrough and confirmation we have had yet. Our friends the Peets know a man named Nigel Hyde, the founder of an organization called Mission Direct in the U.K., which evolved out of short term mission work Nigel used to do along side Mercy Ships. Nigel had just come back from a fund raising trip to the U.S. and Kristin half-jokingly asked the Peets if he would be interested in building a dental clinic. A joke (once again)



Monrovia, Liberia. Pretty from afar, but tragically destroyed by 14 years of civil war. Once a five star hotel, the Ducor, atop the hill, is now occupied by thousands of squatters.

became reality, as the next day Kristin had a two hour meeting with Nigel about the possibility. Our expectations for the clinic's beginnings were exceeded by Nigel's vision for it and willingness to partner and seek funds. We are currently in the process of creating a business plan and proposal for Mission Direct to in turn present to some possible funding sources in the U.S. and elsewhere.

During a short trip to Monrovia last October, I met with the Minister of Health for Liberia and received an official welcome from him to establish the clinic. During the trip, I have been offered five different pieces of land at no cost on which we would be able to build the clinic and even land to build a house for ourselves and other volunteers. God's hand in the project is already clearly seen.

The Anastasis will sail back to Liberia in March of this year and our move to Liberia would be most logical when the ship leaves its service there in November, 2007. Chances are the clinic would not be complete at this point, but other work in Liberia awaits. Kristin hopes to be doing part time work with Samuel's old orphanage, Acres of Hope, and Keith would be able to do dentistry at a small clinic established by Frieda at a local hospital. This is the same hospital at which Keith performed three surgeries last year while Mercy Ships was in Liberia, so this would allow the facilities for surgeries as well. The administrative and logistical side of starting the clinic would more than likely produce more than enough work for some time.

We welcome your e-mails if you have questions about this new direction in which we are headed, and we appreciate your prayers as well.

Back to Ghana...

From many perspectives, Ghana is more "normal" for a Westerner than any other country in West Africa. Signs of development and increased access to health care and health education are all apparent. It is the only West African country developing a national health insurance program. From a dental perspective, far less patients arrive daily with swelling from severe infections and more patients are likely to receive all the treatment they need to restore their mouths into health.



Before arriving here, it was easy to think, "This place has fast food restaurants! [None that you've heard of, but still...] Why are we going there?" Yet amongst development there still remains a struggle with affordability. When I

asked one of our local coworkers what someone would do if their face began to swell from a toothache, he said they would begin to go around to friends and family raising the money needed to get it extracted. This could sometimes take days or weeks, which as I've seen in the past, can nearly be the difference between life and death with a severe infection. Suffering also still exists here in the form of the horrendous tumors and preventable complications you've come to know if you're at all familiar with Mercy Ships' surgical work. And those suffering are forced to hide. One Ghanaian in her late twenties who works in the ship's communication office stated, "I've lived here nearly all my life and I've never seen these people." The ship's surgical schedule was completely full over three months before our departure date. Our reason for being here has become quickly apparent in the face of all the developments of the country.

We have still seen five cases of osteomyelitis at the dental clinic and the ship, a condition which would be found in a dental practice of the developed world once in a lifetime, if that. Andrew traveled about 10 hours to get to the dental clinic and suffered from a history of osteomyelitis that went back 10 years. His weathered, sun-wrinkled face told of how his humble farming income had to support and provide education for his two children since he lost his wife 4 years ago. In addition to these painful circumstances, he has had to bear the constant pain of dead bone in his jaw for the last ten years.

At his follow up exam two weeks after his surgery, Andrew traveled another ten hour journey just to be seen for 5 minutes to check healing. He looked like a different man; smartly dressed, new haircut, big smile. He brought me a typical payment for Mercy Ships dental procedures, a bag of papayas and oranges, which in this case he probably grew himself. Although he was feeling so much better, the long standing infection and removal of the bone in surgery had caused a fistula, or hole that went all the way from his mouth out his cheek. Every time Andrew drank water, it now came out of his cheek just below and in front of his ear. Thanks once again to the experience I've gained while here with Dr. Gary, I was able to do a short surgery and a week later he was healed and "all closed up".

Family News

Samuel, who turned two this summer, is now in preschool for a couple of hours each day, which means that Kristin is back into a part time job. She takes a small group from the ship twice a month to an orphanage about 30 minutes away to visit the children and do activities. We now attend the children's church service there each Sunday as well. Taylor and Lauren are doing great in school and Taylor's taking piano lessons, so we're one step closer to the Partridge thing.

