

Gift of life to Africa from charity with Motec-vation

Surgeon makes it his mission to help in Ghana

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IF you were to sit down and sum up what your life has added to humanity in general, what would you say?

That's the deeply ethical question posed to himself by a Hemel Hempstead surgeon who has set his mission on changing and saving lives in West Africa.

"It is important to commit life to something other than money," said Paul Ofori-Atta, an orthopaedic surgeon at Hemel Hempstead Hospital.

"To me it is about asking are you going to make your life count in any way?"

Mr Ofori-Atta, 54, does no private work, instead devoting his spare time after his NHS jobs are done to the charity Motec Life-UK.

Motec-Life is charged with providing educational, training and health care services to West Africa, in particular in Ghana.

Born in Accra, the Ghanaian capital, Mr Ofori-Atta trained and worked in his homeland before deciding to hone his medical and surgical skills in the UK.

He undertook specialist training in trauma before returning to Ghana. But limited health budgets were turned away from his speciality.

"Funds were used for other



A child at a nutritional rehabilitation centre in Asafo, Ghana

things like malaria," said Mr Ofori-Atta. "The skills I acquired were made almost useless so I came back to the UK and took a different look at the problem."

After a family visit to Africa in 2006, Mr Ofori-Atta hit on the importance of transferring skills to local people as a way of saving and improving lives.

"We treated an 89-year-old man

from the United States and then flew back home," he said.

But what if local people could be trained? The answer led directly to the formation of Motec Life about four years ago.

The charity now has 50 active members, many of them staff at Hemel Hempstead Hospital and 150 others. There are members in Holland, Germany, Canada and the United States.

The 72-word definition of Motec Life is too vast to be reproduced here but Mr Ofori-Atta, who lives in Hunting Gate, Grovehill, Hemel Hempstead, with his wife Gladys, 54, is keen to promote a two-way exchange of information between the two countries.

Every year Motec Life sends volunteers out to Ghana, where they pass on their skills to people working in local health centres. In return they get life-changing experiences of using their wits in often low-tech surroundings.

Mr Ofori-Atta said: "In this country we are used to taking a blood sample and getting the results on a computer screen, but in Ghana it is not as easy as that.

"People come back to England from Ghana and the experience changes their lives."

Motec Life takes a wide definition of health and is now involved in issues as varied as the training of paramedics to teaching moth-



Volunteers tour Motec's International Surgical Centre in rural Ghana, from, Gelasius Mwene, centre administrator, Sheraz Shahbax, orthopaedic specialist formerly of West Herts NHS Trust, Joanna Owiredu-Oppong, a midwife from London and the Rev Bro Bartholomew Camara, the hospital director.

ers about infant nutrition, teaching them skills and planting cash crops.

Mr Ofori-Atta said life expectancy in Ghana is only 59 years, with many children dying before their fifth birthday.

Malnutrition is a huge problem but Motec Life has projects of around £6,000 where farmers are encouraged to plant cheap cash crops that can sustain their families and provide an income.

The success Motec Life is having in actually making a difference means that the charity will have to find more space for equipment as well as employing someone on a part-time basis.

Not many of the rest of us can say we've had that kind of impact on our fellow man.

>> Check out the website at www.moteclife.co.uk



Mrs Ofori-Atta giving a piece of art to Lord Alton, patron of the charity, with Mr Ofori-Atta looking on.