

SURGEON GETS A TASTE OF AFRICAN MEDICINE WITH A SMILE

If surgical world pre-eminence is the Royal College of Surgeons of England's ambition then it behoves its worker bees – the Fellows – to throw themselves to the far corners of the globe to increase the influence of their worthy surgical club. Thus it was that the Editor of the Bulletin threw budgetary constraints out of the fenestre when he sponsored Mr Surgeon FRCS' latest travel plans.

The result is that readers of the Annals now find our inveterate reporter teaching and operating in a small hospital in the Volta Region of Ghana.

Mr Surgeon (S) had read in his little guide of Ghana that Accra, the capital of this country of twenty three million, is the largest street market in world. Thus it turned out to be for on his way from the airport there were street sellers weaving their way between the semi-stationary cars selling dried plantains, maps, snacks, footballs, coat hangers (sic), loo rolls and tubes of super glue while the pavements were stacked with sofas, wicker chairs, bicycles, shoes, coffins, refrigerators and wheelbarrows!

Soon escaping into the hinterland 'S' found himself at the Volta River Authority Hospital in Akosombo downstream from the largest manmade lake in the whole wide-world. With six huge *fistulae* (pipes) descending 300ft at a 50° inclination to hit some of the largest turbines in the world, this dam supplies nearly all of the country's electrical needs.

The hospital three miles away is not so noisy as the generators and not quite as well organised. On the wards, noticed S'', the hygiene needed improvement. However in the operating theatre discipline was better and more rigidly controlled than at S's home base at *Midhampton General Hospital* where even be-suited administrators with their clipboards have the temerity to put their heads around the door of Mr. S's operating room.

At Akosombo to emphasise this point there was a sign:-

WARNING!! IF YOU MAKE A MISTAKE AND GO BEYOND THIS DOOR WITHOUT

The proper clothes

The proper shoes

Or permission

You will be forcibly subjected to a free operation (without anaesthesia) on the delicate parts of your anatomy etc...

You will certainly regret the result!

Mr S's assignment of two weeks in this little hospital passed happily enough. He taught and learnt in equal measure, training the surgeons in tension free mesh hernia repair and fistula surgery on the one hand while learning to spot cerebral malaria on the other. Although on a limited budget, Mr S observed that the medical staff were doing a pretty good job overall. The medical director was a charming obstetrician called Rebecca. Although keen to get 'S' to train all the medical and nursing staff as much as he could in the time available, she seemed to have little appetite to get bogged down in meeting after fruitless meeting as her counterparts in the UK seem to relish.

Indeed, she appeared to have a keen eye on her teams' welfare and competence and Slop doubted she was spending too much of her time getting her doctors to fill in vast forms for annual appraisal or merit payments as his friends back home are now forced to.

At 6.30pm the tropical night fell fast and hard, the mosquitoes began their orgy of biting and the bats started their nocturnal flights around S's bungalow. With a beer and some pasta prepared by *Jonnie* the cook, S would reflect on the day's work and his lecture to come next morning. On his table by his bed under the whirring fan was a copy of his FRCS (Eng) diploma signed by twelve long dead Council members.

Not a bad international qualification to have, pondered Mr Surgeon, as he drained the last drop of *Star Lager* from the glass and turned to sleep.

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