

Koforidua St Joseph's October 2007 Welfare Officer's Report

Fresh off the 'plane after our most recent visit, just a few thoughts about how it's all going.

As always, we received a warm welcome from the Brothers and the Hospital Staff and we were able to make a dent in the arduous trauma workload that Dr Casals had stacked against him. This trip, however, was never planned to be one that concentrated on surgery, but more about diplomacy and politics - at least for some of us. With that in mind there is still a fair bit to say. Others will report on the visits and functions that happened, I'm sure, so it falls on me, I think, to mention some of the lessons we have learned that will help us to plan future trips.

There is a fine line between too little and too many people to perform the tasks that we set ourselves to achieve on each trip. Our beloved leader was in need of a helicopter for most of the two weeks to get to the places he needed to be! Conversely, some of us in Koforidua were almost squabbling over work - at one point we had four Surgeons, two Surgical Assistants and two others all in the theatre at the same time. Thankfully, there was a lot going on outside, in and around the hospital, for us to get involved with so we managed to keep ourselves occupied gainfully.

The Administrators were keen to involve us with the plans for the new hospital building and we did some work to help them get started on equipping it (although there is a great deal more to do!). Dave Lewis and I 'surveyed' the site and the environs to get to grips with the scale of the planned work and we had several brainstorming sessions to create a comprehensive equipment plan, which we hope they will be able to use to make a 'shopping list' to present to the Brotherhood soon.

We were, once again, often to be found on the children's ward; giving out presents from St Michael's School in St Albans, getting to know the staff, the children and their relatives and, sometimes, just clowning about to cheer them up a bit! This activity is very important because it makes the Motec name familiar in that area, where we have so far had a limited surgical input,

and it is very good for the soul as well. Additionally we are able to take up to date pictures to bring back to the UK to aid our bids for support. We are now able to create a fairly powerful slideshow for appropriate occasions. I have already tried this out at my daughter's school in St Albans where I was invited to speak to the whole school, to see if they would choose to support us in some way and it seems to be very effective. I would not seek to use the children as 'shock tactics' in any way, but they have been pleased to help so far. We would not want to put pictures of the children on to the Internet in any volume. This time, some of the children were involved in making a 'thank you' letter which I have duly delivered to St Michael's School, to help keep their interest up. I can tell you they were very touched to get something back from Ghana.

On our arrival this trip, the accommodation that we were expecting was not all available to us, which was a great shame, and one of the houses was in a fairly sorry state. The Monastery tries hard but their funds are very limited. Maybe we should seek an Organisation who would like to raise funds for a specific, finite project? Renovating this accommodation might be a good start.

On a much lighter note, all of us seem agreed that a bit of R&R is an essential ingredient for a successful trip. Dave Lewis, Dr Michael Saleh, Godwin Asamoah and I think we may have assembled a perfect weekend excursion.

This involves a 4am Saturday drive to Cape Coast, visiting the National Park at Kakum Forest for a canopy walk when it opens at 8.30am (to avoid long waits for a guide) and off to a local beach area for the afternoon. The evening and night can be spent at a good hotel and restaurant where crocs swim around the lake while you eat. There is also a crocodile sanctuary just down the road. Sunday morning can be spent in Cape Coast at the slave castle, which is a valuable experience, to be followed by lunch and then drive back at about 2pm to reach base before the evening meal with the Brothers. We did this, more or less, in a different order and had a great time. We would welcome other suggestions as well, of course.

That's all for now,
Steve Townsend