

# ANAESTHETISTS JOIN INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL EFFORTS

~ *Auckland anaesthetist responds to overwhelming need in Africa*



NEUROFIBROMA THAT WAS HUGE AND COVERED THE EYE REQUIRED EXCISING (THE PHOTO BELOW IS OF THE BOY'S SURGERY). © MERCY SHIPS 2011, PHOTOGRAPHER LIZ CANTU.

Freetown, Sierra Leone. July 2011. Middlemore anaesthetist Grant Waters spent two weeks volunteering onboard a floating hospital operated by Mercy Ships, located in one of the poorest nations on earth. A nation still emerging from the effects of a decade-long civil war, Sierra Leone's health system can claim one dentist per million, one doctor per 32,000, while one in eight women still die in childbirth. Dr Waters joined Mercy Ships in bringing their world class vessel, *Africa Mercy* to deliver free health care services to Sierra Leone's people.

Dr Waters was impressed that he was surrounded onboard by people from across the globe who were focused on one primary goal; creating an environment and infrastructure to provide care for people who have nothing.

Comprising the length of two football fields and seven stories high, the Mercy Ship *Africa Mercy* provides a transportable platform for an international volunteer crew of 450 to provide world-class health care services to those suffering at the lowest end of the United Nation's Human Development Index. The crew tends to 70 patients at a time in the general and intensive care wards, as well as the ship's six operating theatres. The theatres are also supported by a pathology lab, x-ray and cat-scan, and

pharmacy - everything medically required to make the floating hospital self-sufficient.

Patients outline anaesthetic assessment is carried out when they are initially screened for surgery by the Mercy Ships team. Typically, patients are admitted to the ship's ward the afternoon before surgery, usually accompanied by a family member who will stay with them. Translators in the local Krio language ensure that patients fully understand the services and treatment offered.

Dr Grant, as he became known onboard, said while there were the inevitable small differences to the way anaesthesia is practised in New Zealand, Mercy Ships used familiar techniques and supplied multiple, current standard of care tools to cope with the inevitable difficult airway procedures. Seven new Paragon Platinum SC430 anaesthesia systems enable the surgical teams to work to international requirements. The ship's Intensive Care Unit has the capacity to deal with a severely ill, inotrope and ventilator dependent septic patients, should it be required. "I even managed to get a bedside echo to exclude significant valve disease in a patient with a worrying murmur and x-ray on my first day", he was delighted to report.

"There were two operating surgeons while I was onboard; general and maxillofacial. The 'max fax' list had its regular inclusions of difficult airways due to lumps and tumours; thyroids are not being performed during this ten-month field service due to a lack of thyroxine in Sierra Leone. The general lists were hernias and hydrocoele cases."

Mercy Ships determines the patient surgical schedule according to when specific surgeons are scheduled to volunteer. These specialties include maxillofacial/

head and neck, plastic and reconstructive surgery, obstetric fistula repair, orthopaedic, ophthalmic, and general surgery. Surgeons performed a total of 1,164 surgeries between February and June, 2011.

There were two particularly interesting cases that Dr Waters noted. "A 50 year old woman had a large maxillary tumour occupying the right side of her mouth and obliterating the nasopharyngeal space on both sides of the oral cavity. The mass would obstruct normal laryngoscopy and tube placement, and nasal intubation was impossible. Using the left sided (right handed) blade, laryngoscopy and intubation was changed from challenging to completely routine."

"I also attended a 22 year old man presenting acutely with a seven-month history of an enlarging tonsillar mass. At presentation he could neither lie flat nor on his left side, as in those positions his airway was occluded by the mass. Despite huge patient co-operation and excellent topicalisation, four experienced clinicians could not intubate him due to anatomic distortion from the mass. Finally, he received an awake tracheostomy before the mass was excised. If Mercy Ships had not been there, his life expectancy would have been very short!"

Dr Waters concludes, "The experience I had was extremely positive. Mercy Ships volunteers are recognized and held in high regard by the local people who are thankful for the contribution they are making to the community. Hopefully one day I will get the opportunity to go back to Mercy Ships. It was an extraordinary and humbling two weeks."



THE SURGICAL TEAM ASSISTED BY THREE AFRICAN TRAINEES FROM ETHIOPIA AND KENYA, ROTATING THROUGH GENERAL SURGERY, MAXFAX, AND ANAESTHESIA. © MERCY SHIPS 2011, PHOTOGRAPHER LIZ CANTU.



DR WATERS WORKING WITH DR PHILIDELPHIA; A REGISTRAR ON THE AFRICAN CHRISTIAN SURGICAL TRAINING SCHEME. ONCE FINISHED HIS TRAINING DR PHILIDELPHIA WILL RETURN TO MALI TO WORK. © MERCY SHIPS 2011, PHOTOGRAPHER LIZ CANTU.

# OVERSEAS AID COMMITTEE VOLUNTEER WORK

*Anaesthetists who are interested in Overseas Aid activities may also contact Dr John Hyndman, Specialist Anaesthetist, Mercy Hospital, Dunedin, who is seeking the following information to compile a database.*

*If you wish to have your name added to the database please send your details to [j.hyndman@xtra.co.nz](mailto:j.hyndman@xtra.co.nz). The database will comprise a list of Anaesthetists, their contact details and a brief outline of their experience, skills, interests and availability.*

The following is an example of the information required.

## OVERSEAS AID SUBCOMMITTEE – DATABASE (EXAMPLE)

**Name:** Dr John Adam Smith  
**Qualifications:** FANZCA  
**DoB:** 1 Jan 1960  
**Address:** 123 Hospital Road, Christchurch  
**Phones:** 03 123 4567 (home) 03 123 7654 (work) 027 2468100 (mobile)  
**Email:** [jasmith@xtra.co.nz](mailto:jasmith@xtra.co.nz)  
**Current position:** Specialist Anaesthetist, Christchurch Hospital  
**Interests:** Regional anaesthesia, Orthopaedic anaesthesia, Obstetric anaesthesia, Pain clinic, Paediatric anaesthesia, Intensive care.  
**Experience:** 2002 Suva Hospital, Fiji. 4 weeks locum anaesthetist 2004 Cook Islands, 4 week locum anaesthetist 2008 Nepal, locum anaesthetist + teaching 6 weeks 2010 Interplast USA 4 weeks

I am prepared to do Pacific Island locums. I can be available for up to 4 weeks per year but need at least 3 months advance warning.

## NZSA SPONSORS THE PACIFIC SOCIETY OF ANAESTHETISTS

The Society is pleased to be able to support a request for funding from the Pacific Society of Anaesthetists, consistent with the NZSA's educational objectives, to enable NZSA members Drs Indu Kapoor and Narko Tutuo to locum in Fiji from 22 to 26 August 2011. They will relieve local staff so that they can attend the Pacific Society of Anaesthetists Conference in Suva. President Rob Carpenter has written to Dr Luke Nasedra of the PSA saying that "he is pleased NZSA members are able to assist with their time and skills and that our Society is able to provide some financial support for the meeting". The locums' travel and accommodation costs will be met by the Society.



Mercy Ships programmes promote health and well-being by serving the urgent surgical needs of the world's forgotten poor and empowering

developing communities. Since 1978, Mercy Ships has provided services in developing nations valued at more than \$NZ 1.1 billion. Mercy Ships has:

- Performed more than 47,000 life-changing operations such as cleft lip and palate repair, cataract removal, orthopaedic procedures, facial reconstruction and obstetric fistula repair.
- Treated over 422,120 patients in village clinics with more than 456,400 procedures performed.
- Treated over 95,800 dental patients with more than 228,100 dental procedures performed.
- Trained over 15,300 local health-care professionals who have in turn trained many others.
- Trained 125,800 local people in basic health care.
- Completed over 1,085 community development projects focusing on water and sanitation, education, infrastructure development and agriculture.

For more information contact Sharon Walls, Communications Manager, [msnz@mercyships.org](mailto:msnz@mercyships.org) or [www.mercyships.org.nz](http://www.mercyships.org.nz).



MERCY SHIPS BRINGS ITS HOSPITAL SHIP TO SIERRA LEONE, WEST AFRICA FOR 2011.



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