

As Lions, we all try to live up to our motto, “We Serve”. Every day around the world, Lions conduct humanitarian acts that we hear of and can help inspire others to do similar actions. With this in mind, I was asked by our District I T Chair, Dayna King, to share some of my experiences of humanitarian medical missions that I have been privileged to be a part of. My name is Joe Baczkowski and have been a member of the Marquette Lions Club the past 30 years. I am retired from a 40+ year career in the medical profession of Orthotics & Prosthetics. I also happen to be a Vietnam Veteran of the US Army.

Armed with my background and a love of travel, I have had the opportunity to help serve people in Africa and Vietnam by being part of medical mission teams to those areas. Between 2006 and March of this year, I have made seven trips to Ghana West Africa with the Foundation of Orthopedics and complex Spine (FOCOS) and three trips to Vietnam with Vets with a Mission (VWAM).

FOCOS is an organization that brings medical professionals from around the world together to provide orthopedic, and especially spinal care, to patients with severe and debilitating deformities. Most of our patients are



CHILDREN WITH POTTS DISEASE NEEDING CARE



BEFORE AND AFTER SCOLIOSIS SURGERY

children from various African countries where health care is close to non-existent for conditions like severe scoliosis and kyphosis. Many have Potts disease which is a complication of untreated tuberculosis that causes destruction of the supportive structures of the spine and leads to their “hunchback” presentation. Many of these children are shunned by their communities and even their families because of their deformities and inability to contribute. Left untreated, they eventually become paralyzed or die prematurely. Some of the most talented spinal surgeons and technicians perform hours long and complicated surgery to straighten and stabilize the deformities after the children are treated for their TB and frequent malnutrition. My job was to build and fit spinal braces to help protect and further stabilize the surgery till well healed and to help with traction and pre-bracing for those awaiting surgery. As you can imagine, I have been privy to things unbeknownst to people in the developed world. I am proud to say that just as Lions do in their humanitarian efforts, Dr. Oheneba Boachie, the founder of FOCOS and main surgeon, had a vision for the future. Starting with only basic teams of volunteers, he eventually built his own specialty hospital and trained local doctors and technicians to provide better and more outreaching care with the goal of eventual self-sufficiency. I no longer need to go there because local people now can do my job.



MAKING A POST OP SPINAL BRACE



DOING THE "HOKEY POKEY" FOR THERAPY WITH SOME OF MY POST-OP BRACE PATIENTS

My Lions Club has been very supportive of my trips overseas and has donated money to help me in buying textbooks for the kids, T-shirts to serve as liners under their braces and money to purchase eyeglasses for some of our patients. I did meet a couple of Lions in Ghana but unfortunately did not have an opportunity to attend a local meeting. I did however go to a Rotary meeting. An associate and I went to get a report on a joint Ann Arbor, MI / Kumasi, Ghana Rotaries' Clubfoot project. They partnered very much like we do in Lions to build a clinic and train personnel in treating the disabling condition of childhood clubfoot. I got to



LITTLE GUY IN CLUBFOOT BRACE AND SHOES

visit and see how a dozen babies at a time would be put in corrective casts to reduce their deformities. Mothers would often walk for miles to have their infants treated every couple weeks and frequently camp out in the fields surrounding the clinic, patiently waiting their turns. I also got to visit a compound developed by a Nun and Religious Brother where they provided physical therapy to amputees and patients with leg paralysis and where they trained local people, many of them people with disabilities, to build the prostheses and leg braces and to make the combination shoes/braces needed to control the clubfoot patients after their casting was completed. Believe me, there are many good people doing good things all over the world along with us Lions!

VWAM has been sending teams of volunteers to Vietnam for the past 29 years. While part of its goal is reconciliation for Vietnam Vets, the main



CROWD OF PEOPLE WAITING TO GET INTO THE "AMERICAN" CLINIC- NEAR HUE VIETNAM

objective is to provide free medical, dental, optical, pharmaceutical and physical care to the poorer people of the country. While there are no Lions Clubs yet allowed in Vietnam, I have seen the impact of Lions' Used Glasses program first hand and have met a number of fellow Lions among

my team members. On two of my trips, my roommates were Optometrists



PROVIDING A WHEELCHAIR

and Lions and who brought hundreds of glasses from the Lions Recycle program to fit to the needy. It was a thrill to help them and see the smiles on peoples' faces as they were able to see clearly again or even for the first time! My main job on these trips was in the orthopedic and physical medicine areas, providing equipment like wheelchairs, canes and crutches and giving treatment and advice on pain management, amputee and physical disability care. I am happy to report that Vietnam has come a long way since the days of the war but many of its people still have a long way to go to get out of abject poverty and a very difficult way of life. Our motto, "We Serve", is alive and well shared around the world. I hope my short story here will encourage anyone with thoughts of reaching out to others, no matter where they are, to go for it. As many of you know, you get back much more than you give.



WORKING WITH YOUNG BURN PATIENT THAT I GOT TO KNOW AND THEN FOLLOW HER PROGRESS OVER LAST 8 YEARS WITH RETURN TRIPS