

REPORT from IHDN MISSION TEAM: TRIP to GHANA - FEBRUARY 8-20, 2009

Dear Friends,

You may have read updates from my correspondent, Mr. David Miller and wondered what was preventing me from sending an original mail from Ghana. Some of you may have been disappointed and given up. This has been a very busy trip, with a lot of activities involved. Without my supporting cast, June and the Agamah girls, it has always been tough to pull through on everything planned, without sacrificing some important things like writing. The poor Internet connection from the village made matters worse. So I had to abandon the attempts made to send a report from Ghana. I arrived home safely on the night of February 20, minus the medical students, who will be in Ghana till early March to complete their electives. It is my pleasure to submit this report to you. To all of you reading this mail, I say thanks for your patience and understanding.

Traveling to Ghana

As you know, we arrived safely in Ghana on February 8th. The team is made of the following final year students from Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis and myself: Mr. Jamie Wade, Mr. Samir Shah, Ms. Syki Duong.

We received excellent service from British Airways that all our suitcases made it safely to Ghana. We travelled with the Tetteh family from Tallahassee, Florida to Ghana. The Tettehs, originally from Ghana, went to Ghana to bury their son, Samuel, who died unexpectedly on January 1, 2009.

Donation of Cardiac Monitor to the Cardiothoracic Unit & others at Korle Bu Teaching Hospital

On Monday, Feb 9, we donated a brand new Welch Allyn Cardiac Monitor to the Cardiothoracic Unit of the Korle Bu Teaching Hospital, Accra. As some of you may recall, this unit provided excellent care to one of our sick team member in July 2008. We made this donation in appreciation of the care and also to provide the opportunity for other Ghanaians to receive similar care, when needed.

We also paid working visits to the Departments of Hematology, Medicine and the Fever's unit where HIV patients are cared for and met the heads of department. We made token donations of medications to the Hematology & Medicine Departments. We also donated Titanium screws to the Dental School. The 5-storey, inpatient ward of the Department of Medicine is undergoing major renovations. They are currently looking for help to equip these wards. When we finally left Korle Bu, it was past 2:00 pm. We crawled in traffic for almost three hours before finally leaving Accra for Agbozume. We got to Agbozume around 8:00 pm, very exhausted but thankful.

Clinics at IHDN Mission Hospital, Weta

We started our work in Ghana on Tuesday, Feb 10, with morning devotion, during which I shared from Romans 12. Daily devotions with singing of hymns were part of our daily routine at Agbozume. We then joined Dr. Barnor, the new medical officer of the IHDN

Mission Hospital and his staff to see patients at the outpatient clinic. The clinic attendance during the first few days was less than 20 patients per day, until public announcements were made by the town crier, the village public announcer. This resulted in an almost 50% increase in visits. Malaria remains the commonest diagnosis, accounting for over 40% of visits followed by hypertension. We treated several emergencies, including seizure, suspected sepsis, dehydration from severe diarrhea and trauma. After the daily clinics, we hosted tutorial for the students on topics in Tropical Medicine and International Health.

IHDN Mission Hospital has applied for and still waiting for approval to join the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS). Joining the NHIS will allow the government of Ghana to pay for the care provided at the hospital. It is estimated that about 65% of the folks in the Ketu district have now joined the NHIS. The annual premium is less than \$6 for the very poor and around \$40 for the very rich. To recover some cost, the clinic charges about \$1.5 for consultations. Most people are very poor and not able to afford this amount, but we still provide the care needed at the clinic. This has resulted in an operation deficit of over \$10,000 since the opening of the mission hospital in June 2008. It is estimated that once NHIS approval is received, daily clinic attendance will exceed 100-150. More resources will definitely be needed by the clinic to be able to meet the increased demand. Despite delays in payment of bills by the NHIS, this is the best alternative for helping finance healthcare in this part of the world instead of the fee for service that existed before.

Clinic at Worgbato

On Friday, the 13th of February, we held a rural outreach clinic at Worgbato, a village of about 3-5 miles from Agbozume seeing 49 patients. This was to give an opportunity for the students to experience medical care to the poor where there is no hospital. We saw an 80+ year old lady with metastatic cancer of the vulva seeking help. She had apparently been to several hospitals and given the same diagnosis but had a hard time accepting this diagnosis. With careful explanations she and the family appeared to accept comfort care. Dr. Barnor and his staff remained at the hospital and treated patients while we were at Worgbato. One of the results of the clinic at Worgbato is the formation of a Women's Health & Development Club. The aim of this club is to provide health information to the village women and strengthen their efforts in the raising and upkeep of their families. The first meeting is scheduled for Feb 24.

Staff Dinner & presentation of Gifts, including IHDN Ghana T-shirts

We hosted a dinner for the IHDN Ghana staff on Feb 13. We presented gifts, including the new IHDN T-Shirts to the staff. We also used this opportunity to celebrate the graduation of my cousin, Gospel Agamah from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology Medical School, Kumasi. It was a night filled with fun and excitement. Music was provided by the IHDN praise and worship band being put together by Mr. Ben Agamah.

Funeral at Accra

On Saturday, Feb 14, I turned 49 years. I thank God for an additional year to my life and His blessings upon me. No parties or speeches were planned, instead we gave away ourselves and our time to help and encourage others in need. We went to Accra to attend the funeral for Mr. Samuel Tetteh. Since we traveled with the Tetteh family, it was very appropriate that we continued our support during their time of grief and mourning. It also gave the opportunity for the students to experience the intersection of culture, society and family on life and death issues in Ghana. On our way from Accra, we stopped at our family farm in Somanya. We were caught in a major rainstorm but managed to get out without getting stuck in the mud. It turned out that the whole southern half of the country experienced extremely severe thunderstorm, resulting in the shutting down of electricity across most parts of the country.

Visit to Keta Slave Castle and the beach

On Sunday Feb 15, we attended church service with at the EP Church, Agbozume. I was given the opportunity to share and encourage the congregation. In the afternoon, the Ghanaian team joined us to visit the Slave Castle at Keta, about 25 miles away from Agbozume. We also stopped at Keta Secondary School, the state funded public high school that provided excellent educational opportunities for most us from the Volta Region. On the way back, we stopped at Denu beach. I watched the team members play beach soccer and swim in the Atlantic ocean. They had so much fun till it was dark and the mosquitoes paid their first visit.

Last day at IHDN Clinic

The last Clinic day before I leave Ghana is usually the busiest. This year's was no different but less tiring. I spent Monday the 16th at the clinic consulting several people, who traveled from various parts of the country to receive care. During previous years I had to do everything all by myself, but not this year. I had help from Dr. Barnor and the young doctors in training and my cousin Gospel. The staff wore their T-Shirt and also brought a tremendous amount of enthusiasm to work that day. We saw a lot of patients but wrapped work early enough to take pictures and say good bye.

Visit to Togo

We visited Togo on Tuesday, Feb 17. I still have cousins, aunties, nephews in Togo. One of our long term goals is to be able to extend the work of IHDN to Togo. So we used this opportunity to strengthen existing relationship, observe and explore the potentials available for IHDN in Togo. We also visited family and friends and shopped in the open market. It also allowed the students to experience life in a French speaking country in Africa.

Travel back to Accra, to wrap up visit

I left Agbozume on Wednesday, Feb 18 for Accra, without the medical students. I visited the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation to visit Mr. Etse Kalitsi one of my seniors, I had not seen for over 35 years. It was good to talk to him about our FM Radio project at Weta. From there we visited Dr. Zakaria a surgeon at Police Hospital. We then went on to the offices of the Christian Health Association of Ghana (CHAG), to find out about

membership in this organization. CHAG is an umbrella organization that has brought together all the major churches – Catholics, Presbyterians, Assemblies of God, Pentecostals, Baptists, involved in the provision of health care to Ghanaians. The group is recognized by the Ministry of Health and receives funding to help pay bills for member institutions. Member institutions also participate in National programs. IHDN is not a church but doing church work, including provision of healthcare to poor villagers in Ghana. Our prayer is that the Almighty God will open the doors for us to become members of this organization to enhance and sustain our work in Ghana.

On Thursday, Feb 19, the day of departure, I made a stop at Korle Bu Hospital to say goodbye to several people, including Dr. Grace Parkins, Dean of the Dental School and Pastor Emmanuel Osei Addo, new pastor of Accra Chapel.

I would like to the Almighty Father for another successful trip. I also thank all of you for supporting us in various ways. To all who have prayed and continue to pray know that the Lord has answered your prayers. Apart from dealing with the challenges of running an organization with little resources and building effective teams, to carry out mission goals, there were no major difficulties. To those who are just curious or not sure, be encouraged, step up and help and or serve someone today. It does not have to be with IHDN. God will still bless you. The medical students are having a time of their life and I know they will have lots to present and write about after they return. My prayer is that this experience in Ghana will encourage them and guide them as they pursue postgraduate training care for fellow human beings.

Once again we appreciate your prayers, support, comments and suggestions

Regards and God bless.

Dr. Edem Agamah
President, IHDN -USA