



OUR 2024 KBNF NEUROSURGICAL MISSION TO LIBERIA

Dear smartname

In February this year, we undertook another KBNF neurosurgical mission, bringing together neurosurgeons, residents, neuro nurse anesthetists and nurses from the US through our partnership with Dr. Dan Miulli and Helping Those in Need, as well as Dr. Harry Akoto who flew in from Ghana. We had three occupational therapists from Canada—Kristina Faulkner, Nicole Gingrich and Janice Chiang, forming a strong team along with Samuel Hennings, Liberia's only public physiotherapist.

Dr. Olamjii Ajanaku flew in from Nigeria and Yahya Njie and Maimuna Nyassi—two nurses from The Gambia—flew in as well. Nurses from the JFD Hospital in Tappeta came to help and serve and we were grateful that Anders Engstrom, a biomedical engineer from Sweden, could also come again. Marj and I were there for nearly four weeks, along with Eunice Famme, one of our faithful volunteers.

There are so many others to name. Our team was large and made a significant impact. We did 30 procedures on 26 patients and we are so grateful to report that our patients are all recovering well.

As you know, a neurosurgical mission is a significant undertaking. We will continue to tell the stories over the next year and in the years to come, for sure. But in the meantime, Idelette McVicker, our Volunteer and Communications Coordinator has written a piece to invite us all along on the journey. Although she was born and raised in South Africa, this was her first trip to Liberia and her first neurosurgical mission. She was with us for the four weeks. Here are her thoughts:



A KBNF NEUROSURGICAL MISSION IS ABOUT PEOPLE

By Idelette McVicker

What is a KBNF neurosurgical mission? Why go to the other side of the world and why spend resources to gather people from around the world in one city, one hospital and do free surgeries? In February 2024, I got on a plane to Liberia and if you were to ask me, I would tell you this is what I saw:

A KBNF mission is about people.

A KBNF mission is about two doctors, so determined to become neurosurgeons, they would learn a brand new language first, spend years in another country away from home and family to specialize and then come back to serve their people.



A KBNF mission is about walking and working alongside them, holding up their arms, encouraging and strengthening their efforts.



A mission is about another neurosurgeon who takes personal holiday time to fly across country borders to mentor and serve and do surgery next to his colleagues.



It's my duty to humanity, he says, as he smiles and we are reminded why we all do this.



A KBNF mission is about neurosurgeons who gather a whole team to fly across continents and time zones to share expertise and skills, heart and resources.

A mission is about people gathering from around the world with one purpose: to serve and love others.



A KBNF mission is about people who need neurosurgical care, but can't afford it. A KBNF mission is about not only providing neurosurgical care, but providing excellent care and it's about a concerted effort to build a whole ecosystem.

A KBNF mission is about brain and spine surgeries and it's about so much more than that.

A KBNF mission is about creating more equal access and people receiving the help they need in their own country.



A KBNF mission is about people who care with compassion and it is about people who need compassionate care. It is about patients, nurses, anesthesiologists, surgeons, biomedical engineers, occupational therapists, physical therapists and physician's assistants and, of course, the people who feed them all.





A KBNF mission about people who help tell the stories: photographers, videographers and writers. It is about the people who make it all happen, from doing airport runs to late night phone calls and paying the bills. It is about a bus driver, collecting the team from the hospital way past midnight and then being right back at the hotel early the next morning to pick everyone up again.

A mission is about hospital administrators and Board members and country coordinators. A mission is about elevator operators and the person who sees us carrying boxes of medical supplies up four flights of stairs and jumping in to help.



A mission is about the person who empties the garbage bin in the doctor's lounge over and over again.

A mission is about people doing whatever needs to be done.





A KBNF mission is also about the people who stay home. The ones who stay behind, so others can go. It's about people who help ship beds and sort medical supplies and pay for containers. It's about people behind the scenes who serve and love quietly, so others can have more equal access to expertise, supplies and equipment. It's about people who give, so we can pull off a mission this size.

A KBNF mission is about people who give what they can.



A KBNF mission is about drills, a new lumbar set and scrubbing in to complex surgeries. A mission is about teamwork and collaboration and strategic partnerships. A mission is about nurse's training and doing morning rounds and evening rounds and slowly, but surely transforming the medical landscape of a country.



A KBNF mission is about showing up, again and again, year after year, building trust, building relationship and always honouring the ones who remain.



A mission is about a patient who can walk again.



A mission is about a patient who now has a chance to live pain-free. A mission is about a sister who runs to find help when her brother needs urgent care and a daughter who doesn't leave her mother's bedside.

A mission is about hearing the cry of a 21-day-old baby and noticing the strength in his voice—his determination to live—and his mother who holds him and gently nurses him and cares for him after his brain surgery.

A mission is about a neurosurgeon by that tiny patient's bedside during morning rounds, quietly picking up his very tiny hand and just standing there, holding it.

A KBNF mission is about these heart-spilling-over-this-is-too-much-and-what-will-happen-to-this-baby-but-this-is-also-ridiculously-beautiful moments, over and over again.



A mission is about equipment breaking down and people standing by to respond in the inevitable emergencies. A mission is about working through enormous challenges, like the power going out—not once, not twice, but possibly several times during a surgery.



A mission is about the water supply shutting down and a nurse holding a container with clean water, so a surgeon can scrub in safely and surgery can go on.



A mission is about deep conversations, wrestling with big questions and trying to find solutions around limited resources.

Always limited resources.

But a mission is also about big hearts, a generosity between us and the determination to never give up.

A mission is about seeing how the sun sets on us all at the end of the day and remembering our place in the story of being human.



A KBNF mission is about joy. It's about community and friendships across borders.





Sometimes that means taking silly selfies together.



A mission is about saying thank you and spontaneous dancing by the nurse's station. A mission is about stories around the dinner table and a lot of laughter.

A KBNF mission is about hearts becoming knitted together for a larger purpose.



A mission is about a mother who can talk again, lift her right arm again and be there for her family again. A mission is about a twin brother and sister playing together after his surgery.

A mission is about hope.



A mission is also about complexity.

A mission is about a mother running towards our team in the night as we walk to the bus, pleading for her daughter. A mission is about many who can't be helped.

A mission is about holding all of it in our hearts.

A mission is about remembering that we cannot do everything, but that we can do something. A mission is about choosing to do the something that only we can do, as Marj reminds us.

A mission is about creating change and inevitably being changed.



A KBNF mission is about our connectedness to each other.

A KBNF mission is about partnering to heal the ones we can.

A KBNF mission is about people, always and always, yes.

And now, after the suitcases are unpacked and the memories of heat and humidity fade, what remains of a KBNF neurosurgical mission is the Love.



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A KBNF MISSION IS ABOUT
OUR HEARTS BECOMING
KNITTED TOGETHER FOR A
LARGER PURPOSE.

Idelette McVicker



FROM IDELETTE'S HEART:

Dear KBNF Family, it was such an honor to be in Liberia for this recent neurosurgical mission. My heart is still so full and I hope you got a sense of the impact, the joy and the deep relationality of our work—right alongside the complexity—in the piece above. I set out

to write a “report,” but instead, this flowed out and it became very personal. So, we decided to do this newsletter a little differently. I hope you liked it.

I joined KBNF nearly one year ago as Volunteer Coordinator and over time, have stepped more and more into Communications (which is my background.) It was profound to see the direct impact of our work—every piece of gauze, every syringe, every folded box of linens and every bed finding a new life and such a significant role in Liberia. I came back to Canada with one of the most profound blessings one could ask for: a sense of being part of meaningful work. It gives me renewed joy and enthusiasm as I rally volunteers and as we fill boxes and load containers. I love now knowing not just the names of our KBNF family in Liberia and some of the other countries we serve in West Africa, but more of the hearts.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Friends, we couldn't pull off the work that we do without your generosity and support. Thank you for standing with us as we do this work of growing and building neurosurgical excellence in West Africa. We are so grateful for you.

Stay tuned for updates on the new KBNF Centre in Ladner, the hospital beds making an impact in Ghana and needing your help for the Big Move. We will send out another update next week,

May you have a beautiful and blessed Easter, wherever you find yourself in the world this weekend.

Sincerely,

Rose Woller

KBNF Executive Director

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