

Bringing Hope to Africa: Medical Missions

By Myra A. Medina



Alison Hagoski is a nurse in our Cardiopulmonary Rehabilitation program. Twice a year, Alison and others from the [Lighthouse Medical Mission](#) Teams make their visits to Africa. Upon returning from her most recent trip, she shared her experiences on these medical missions.

- When did your journey first begin and how long have you been involved with these medical missions?

“My first medical mission was to Sierra Leone West Africa in 2002 the year their 10-year civil war had ended; it was and still is a devastated country full of immense needs, injured people and little hope. I have since had the privilege of going on 10 further missions including the countries of Liberia, Burundi and the Gambia.”

- Like most people, I was curious to know what the impetus was for Alison’s travels to Africa. This is after all, not the typical travel destination for that yearly vacation.

“When returning from my first trip I remember thinking that the needs of these people and this country are so overwhelming what is the use of going again? Then God begins to stir that one memory or incident where you gave an individual something that they

had no hope or expectation of receiving. It may have been that life saving antibiotic or if may have been the look on the face after giving a child a used toy, it never leaves you.”

- Describe if you can, a typical day in one of these missions. Elaborate and describe according to the place you’ve visited. I can imagine that each trip and each place that you’ve visited.



“Each team is met by a welcoming crew of the indigenous people, upon arrival, which consists of pastors and helpers. They are incredibly grateful, helpful and protective of us. In Sierra Leone we usually have a couple of women from the church that cook for us and so the day begins with eggs and plantains, after hopefully some sleep the night before. We are then transported to a building where we are met with scores of people lined up and waiting. Over the next 2 – 3 hours unpack the boxes of supplies and by 9am we are ready to begin triaging. The work and flow is depending on the team we have, the people’s needs and our ability to meet them. Electricity is often not available, it’s hot, noisy and the needs are many with its constant movement and demands. Small children are everywhere, sick, crying, the elderly sit patiently and the mother’s wait with hope. The day ends around five. We return to our “hotel” eat, hope for some sort of shower and quickly get ready for church. This is a precious and important time in which we connect with the people who host us, building relationships and encouraging them. Then we attempt to rest sleep and get ready for the next day’s adventure.”

- I can imagine that you have many memorable times, and places in your years of travel. If you had to choose one, what would it be?

“A small girl about 8 years old walks into a chaotic clinic setting late on the 3rd day carrying a small obviously very sick young baby - she is asked through an interpreter, "where is the baby's mother?" "The mother done died," she replies. "The father, I ask?"

She point out to the massive crowd that surrounds the small hot building. She then says, "I want you to take the baby." Not knowing that for years that my secret dream has been to adopt an African child, and subsequently hands me the lethargic, hot and mal nourished little girl. I take her to the treatment area and start to work on her, meanwhile there is a woman on our team who after many years of trying to have children had recently been denied adoption and other methods, I bring her and our team leaders over to the situation. The father is found in the crowd and miraculously the process of healing the baby and the long process of her adoption begins.... It was many months...no, I didn't get to keep the baby but I got the privilege of being a small part in the process. Emma Esther Shiota now lives with her Minnesotan mother and Japanese American father in Minnesota and is a wonderful, healthy 8-year-old little girl."

- You've brought your son along with you on the most recent mission in April. What can you tell parents who might be thinking about getting their own children and families involved?



"Dr. Robert Hamilton, the leader of the Lighthouse Medical Missions encourages young people to participate on medical missions trips with us. They are a welcome part of the team. They work extremely hard, often in very difficult conditions, learn a great deal about team work, medical conditions and giving - all while lacking the comforts of home. Each (of my children) has been with me at least once and has returned requesting to go back. The memories that you and your children have are incredible and I encourage you to do it."

- What would you say to those who are interested in participating in the medical missions? Do you have any tips for those who want to get involved in these medical missions? Any words of wisdom?

“We have so much; we now have an avenue to give – either by going or by supporting someone else to go. It will change your life to be involved and giving at this level. You return incredibly tired, amazingly fulfilled but stirred and changed forever.”

Lauren Harning is the exercise physiologist in the cardiopulmonary program. She is joining Alison this October for a medical mission to Sierra Leone.

- What made you decide to join the medical mission?

“Listening to Alison’s stories about her time in Africa have always inspired me. I feel like I have the time and resources to give to the people of Africa for this once in a lifetime experience. I love to travel and can’t pass this up.”

- When and where will you be traveling to?

“We will be leaving Los Angeles on October 14th and heading to Sierra Leone, Africa. Our clinic will be set up in the town of Lungi, just north of Freetown.”

- What if any, are your expectations for this trip?

“I expect to be working very hard all day in the medical clinic. We will probably see 3,500-4,000 patients in the week. I’m excited to visit such a unique part of the world and learn from their culture. I have heard the African people are very friendly and appreciate what we do very much. I’m also looking forward to working with such a talented group of doctors, nurses, and other volunteers.”

- How are you preparing for this trip?

This past June, I participated in "Walk to Africa" an 8-mile walk through Santa Monica sponsored by the Lighthouse Church as a fundraiser. I am also preparing for the trip by getting the recommended vaccinations such as Yellow Fever and Malaria. I am also hoping to have my family and friends help me reach my goal of fundraising the \$2900 required for the trip.

Donation page: www.walktoafrika.com/laurenharning

For more information about Lighthouse Medical Missions and for donation opportunities:
www.lighthousemedicalmissions.com/