

Report of Humanitarian Mission to Madagascar

Robyn Dandridge

In November 2014, I had the opportunity to work with the Mercy Ships in Madagascar. I worked aboard the Africa Mercy as a PACU Nurse where I recovered patients after orthopedic surgery, hernia repair, and maxillofacial surgery. While onboard, I had the opportunity to attend educational in services given by Dr. Gary Parker. I also got to observe the surgery of one of my little patients before I recovered her. Dr. Gary Parker is the Chief Medical Officer & Maxillofacial Surgeon of Mercy Ships. It was an awesome experience, being in the operating theatre with Dr. Gary and the team as he reconstructed the palate of his tiny patient. When she was awake and stable I carried her from PACU to the Ward, as the interpreter opened the door, all eyes were upon us. I walked in and handed the baby to her mother amongst smiles and cheers from the other patients and families. It's difficult to describe the stress and joy of recovering this little patient and presenting her back to her mother.

I consider it a privilege and a blessing to be a nurse, I do not take for granted the skills and experience I have acquired over the past decades while working and learning in various settings as a staff nurse. I am grateful to my employer, ASPAN, and others who have provided a variety of opportunities for me to improve my skills and knowledge which improves the patient experience, the human experience!

This has been amazing experience; it can be overwhelming as we are daily bombarded by what's wrong in the world. It is so refreshing to work with such a diverse group, as Mercy Ships, to improve the human condition. When we sacrifice to give of ourselves we are often surprised by how much we receive. The gratitude of the people of Madagascar is humbling. Though we did not speak the same language, the people took great effort to convey to us the gratitude they had for the care we provided. Because of limited education and health care, many of the people have false ideas regarding the cause of their deformities and the purpose of the big white ship. As one young man awoke from anesthesia he tearfully thanked me for being there and caring. The interpreter said the patient came against the advice of his family and friends, they told him that the foreigners from the big white ship came to steal their children and their internal organs. He said that he would go back to his village and tell them that we really do care.

I am grateful to Mercy Ships for providing a means for me to take my skills to Madagascar and to ASPAN for the scholarship to help defray the cost of the trip. ASPAN's core purpose of advancing the unique specialty of perianesthesia nursing was certainly realized in this mission.

Mercy Ships information: www.mercyships.org



Provided by Mercy Ships

The world's largest civilian hospital ship, the Africa Mercy. The vessel is equipped with five state-of-the-art operating rooms and ward bed-space for 82 patients and is staffed by 400 volunteer crew from 40 nations.



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Mercy Ships volunteer and ASPAN member PACU Nurse

Robyn Dandridge cares for a child that received a free
orthopedic surgery onboard the Africa Mercy in Madagascar