

Medical Mission: Caring for Kenya

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How do you summarize life changing feelings in a brief essay? My journey began three years ago when I met Steve James at an ASPAN National Conference. His story touched my heart and I researched his cause. I had been wanting to serve a medical mission but *Kenya Relief* lit a flame in me because it wasn't solely a medical mission, but was infused with humanitarian needs also. From October 10 to 21, 2018, not only did I get to care for surgical patients in Migori, but I was able to serve the community in a small way also.

After spending the night in Nairobi, we set out for an eight-hour long, bumpy van ride through flooded dirt roads. We were welcomed by the *Kenya Relief* community. It was both heartwarming and breathtaking. The love and appreciation we were given cannot be replicated.

After a day of looking at the facility (clinic) and equipment we had to work with, we got to work. Our clinic ran for 3 and ½ days serving 324 patients. Our team consisted of nurse



practitioners, surgeons, anesthesiologist, certified nurse anesthetist and RNs. All of us were either working in the clinic or the operating rooms and postanesthesia care units. We would arrive by 6:30 am each day and would return to our dorm rooms around 8 pm. There were two ORs with two tables in each room. There were four PACU beds (Phase I). This is where I spent my time. There were open windows (no glass) and no air conditioners.

Mosquitoes swarmed outside the window around the wet laundry hanging on the bushes. This laundry had just been done by two women in a wash basin in the bathroom.

Needless to say, our PACU environment was very different than to what I am accustomed. The wheels of the stretchers in PACU had ragged edges of rubber on them. So, to take our patients to the Stage 2 PACU, we had to transfer them to a very old transport stretcher or wheelchair. We traveled outside to get to the next recovery phase. Many of our patients spent the night in this area. The people of Migori have the highest concentration of AIDS in Kenya. Many of the children have lost their parents to the disease. There was no needless equipment in our facility.



We performed many resections of thyroid goiters. We could not remove all of the goiter because the patients cannot afford the medication they would need to take for the rest of their lives. There were also many hernias that you could even imagine how these patients have walked around all of these years living in such a difficult way.



Cleft lips and palates were repaired on beautiful children. Burns were revised. Large facial tumors growing into the orbit of the eye. Lipomas and extra digits were removed.

These were life-changing surgeries for these people. Many of these disfiguring problems cause these people social, economic and psychological problems.

One man expressed his gratitude for the removal of a thyroid goiter through tears. "I can now marry!" One man begged me to wait at the clinic so he could go home and bring me a goat for repayment of our care.

I served with wonderful Kenyan nurses in the PACU. They love their culture and serve their people with love and compassion.

Team #19 of *Kenya Relief* bonded well. I did not know anyone when I arrived and felt the bonding influence of our desire to serve this community with the skills we had. I will be forever grateful for this opportunity and would encourage others to look for an opportunity that fits their goals. *Kenya Relief* met all of mine and more.



Photos courtesy Nan Wecker.