The Kudjip Experience—Graduate Doctors

KNH is a general hospital, serving as the District Hospital for a large area of the Whagi and Jimi valleys of central Papua New Guinea. We have about 130 inpatient beds, and in 2009 we saw 51,889 outpatient visits and 4,705 inpatient admissions. In addition we delivered about 1122 babies (that's about 90 per month, of which 18-19 are c-sections) and did 1765 surgical procedures. We saw over 800 people accept Christ.

We have a 32-bed adult medicine ward, a 31-bed surgical ward, a 32-bed pediatric ward, a 12-bed tuberculosis ward, and a 24-bed maternity ward. We have a labor suite with 3 delivery beds and space to expand to 6. We have a nursery the capacity of which is quite flexible, up to about 10 babies. We have one operating theater and a minor procedure room. Our Outpatient Department includes 8 exam rooms and a 2-bed procedure area. The Emergency Room consists of 7 beds and a 2-bed orthopedics area.

We have both fixed and portable x-ray machines, and can do most basic views. We have two ultrasound machines, which are used by all of our physicians. Our laboratory facilities include both hematology and chemistry, as well as microscopy and blood banking. Unfortunately, we have no microbiology lab, but we are able to do serological tests for syphilis, hepatitis B and HIV.

We are actively involved in care of patients with HIV and AIDS. We have a maternal-to-child-transmission prevention program. We currently provide HIV voluntary testing and counseling, and HART through our HIV clinic.

Our medical staff presently includes seven family physicians, a pediatrician and a general surgeon. All are residency-trained and board-certified. In addition, we frequently have visiting physicians in a variety of specialties.

Volunteers who come here usually have a wide variety of experience. They generally are assigned a portion of one of our inpatient wards. They see those patients on morning rounds, and then spend the remainder of their day in the Outpatient department. Volunteers in the primary care specialties see outpatients along with our staff doctors. Those in more limited specialties usually see referral cases. Since practicing here can be very different than practicing in more developed countries, we try to make sure that our staff doctors are available to answer questions as needed. Surgeons usually spend 2 or 3 days a week in the OR. Many surgical specialists enjoy the chance to scrub with our general surgeon on cases outside their usual experience.

Primary care doctors commonly do more procedures than they would in their home country. They often do several thoracenteses and pericenteces, repair complex lacerations, do many I&Ds and lumber punctures. They may do ultrasounds, D&Cs, manual extraction of retained placentas, and closed reductions of various fractures. Depending on their experience, they may assist in the operating theater, and may perform cesarean sections.

Most of our volunteers take call. The primary care doctors take general call in rotation with our staff doctors. If their skills do not include obstetrics, a staff doctor is assigned back-up duties for OB. Similarly, internists who are not comfortable treating children have back-up for that. Specialists usually make themselves available after hours for emergencies in their specialty.
Volunteers also have opportunities to teach. Our staff doctors are always striving to broaden their skills, and usually take advantage of the knowledge of any volunteers that come. In addition, we often have students or residents here, and volunteers that are here at the same time often get involved in teaching.

Volunteers participate in the spiritual care of patients. They are encouraged to pray with and for their patients, and to offer witness and spiritual counsel (as much as possible, given linguistic and cultural limitations).

Volunteers have the opportunity to work with and to teach Papua New Guinean physicians. We are a training site for a post graduate training program in rural and remote medicine. Registrars (equivalent to residents in the US) come here for surgical rotations, and may come for other rotations in the future. Frequently Papua New Guinean resident physicians (equivalent to interns in the US) come here for a general rural rotation.

Outside the hospital, volunteers have opportunities to gain an understanding of the people of the Whagi Valley. They often visit nearby villages, visit with local people and attend cultural events. Most worship in "bush" churches on some of the Sundays that they are here. There are many interesting hikes in the vicinity of KNH that afford opportunities to see both people and beautiful scenery. Visitors usually go into the nearby town of Mount Hagen once or twice during their stay. (Most find that once is more than enough!)

In addition, volunteers usually get to know the staff of KNH well. They are usually invited into the homes of the medical and non-medical missionaries, and are included in activities on the station. Those with a personal interest in medical missions have opportunities to ask questions of missionaries at various stages of their careers, and to discuss their own plans and aspirations with experienced missionaries. They also are able to observe how missionaries and their families live, and to gain an understanding of the challenges and the rewards of missionary life.

The missionaries at Kudjip consider it a pleasure and a privilege to work with volunteers here. Many of the missionaries have maintained friendships with former volunteers.