A Medical Volunteer Expedition to Ghana

NASHVILLE, TN — A group of nine Meharry students, seven from the School of Medicine and two from the School of Graduate Studies and Research, along with Sanika Chirwa, M.D., Ph.D., professor of neuroscience and pharmacology with Meharry’s School of Medicine, embarked on a mission of good will to the Republic of Ghana, March 20 – March 30, 2014. Their mission, dubbed “Meharry for Africa,” proved to be a productive and highly memorable educational experience.

Once in Ghana, Meharry students were divided into two groups and were teamed up with local medical students on clinical rotations in the obstetrics and gynecology department at Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital in Accra, Ghana. They were presented with unique opportunities to observe and learn about the provisions of obstetric care within settings with limited resources and personnel. Professors Joseph Seffiah and Samuel Obed, in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital, were the local hosts who oversaw the group’s activities while in Ghana.

In addition, Dr. Chirwa had the opportunity to make presentations related to his “Sleep and Pregnancy” study being conducted at Meharry and subsequently held discussions with his counterparts at Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital reviewing prospects for future funding with organizations such as, the National Institutes of Health, the United States Agency for International Development and the Gates Foundation.

Overall, the trip to Ghana was characterized by many defining moments that included the somber occasion of attending the burial ceremony for the local Queen Mother and the deeply emotional tours of the infamous Elmina Castle, first established as a trade settlement and later becoming one of the most important stops on the route of the Atlantic slave trade, where the majority of those enslaved initially stopped before they were transported to the New World, America. Students were emotional as they posed inside the horrific “door of no return” which memorialized the final exit point of the slaves out of Africa. The “door of no return” is a reminder to all about the human drudgery and debasing atrocities of African slavery.

In Kakum National Park, located in the coastal localities of the Central Region of Ghana, everyone took part in walking along the suspended canopies surrounded by the giant trees of the rainforest.

Perhaps the most touching, and rewarding experience, was the day-long visit to the local “City of Refuge Children’s Village (CRCV).” The CRCV is run by the City of Refuge Ministries and it is a place where children, who have been orphaned, abandoned and rescued from slavery, have come to call home. It defies description to see how hope is being restored in these children who were without any other means or options to guarantee their survival and a bright future.

The Meharry for Africa group plans to hold an “open day” event at Meharry in the near future where they will share their amazing stories about their most rewarding and incredible visit to Ghana.