

Special Report

Making Waves

How the Pan-African Academy of Christian Surgeons (PAACS) is addressing the urgent and growing need for surgeons in Africa.

Keeping Faith in Africa – Pan-African Academy of Christian Surgeons Update

Ever throw a rock in the pond and watch the ripples slowly die out? It would take a huge number of rocks to ever really influence the pond, to raise the water level or have any other lasting effect, wouldn't it? Did you ever wonder what would happen if the ripples never died out? What if they went on and on?

A little over a decade ago, Dr. Dave Thompson was the only surgeon at Bongolo Hospital in the jungles of Gabon. He faced the reality that if he died or

Several hundred thousand women each year are left with horrible urinary fistulas dripping urine, making them social outcasts.

At the CMDA Continuing Medical and Dental Education conference held at Brackenhurst in 1996, Thompson shared his vision with the other missionary surgeons there. They responded with enthusiasm. A steering committee was formed. Initially, ten mission hospitals expressed enthusiasm, but then the realities of the magnitude of implementing the idea became evident – only three hospitals were able to actually begin training residents. Sadly, for various reasons, two of those had to close shortly after they began. The fledgling program at Bongolo Hospital limped on, graduating its first surgeon in 2002. In 2003, Dr. N. Eugene Cleek, known to his family and friends as “Pokey,” closed his California practice and took over the surgery responsibilities at Bansa Baptist Hospital in Kumbo, Cameroon. The same year, the Pan-African College of Surgeons (as it was known then) went into partnership with the Loma Linda University and became one of the CMDA ministries. In 2004, the Pan-African College of Surgeons became the Pan-African Academy of Christian Surgeons (PAACS).

From Suffering to Service

In 2003, Dr. Domain Fuka smuggled his family out of Kisangani (in northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo) after dark to avoid rival militias. He booked passage on a barge that took them 1,000 kilometers down the Congo River to Kinshasa (DRC). Crossing to Brazzaville in the Republic of Congo, they crossed the country in a hired pickup truck and slipped into Gabon at night on a logging road to avoid a corrupt border official. A week later, Domain began his training with PAACS at the Bongolo Hospital. Dr. Fuka graduated from the PAACS Program in July, 2007 and left Gabon with his family to move to the Pioneer Christian Hospital in Impfondo, Republic of Congo. There he is the only fully-trained surgeon in the two northern provinces of the country, serving nearly a million people.

Since the inception of the program, seven graduates have been disciplined, trained in surgery, and graduated.



Drs. Domain Fuka and Dave Thompson (back) review patient's x-ray while Drs. Jean Yardouno and Yali Ramazani (foreground) study

left the mission field, he would leave little legacy and would have made little impact on the great need for surgery in Africa. The best countries in Africa only have one surgeon of any type for a quarter million people; the worst have only one for 2.5 million people. For the lack of simple surgery, people routinely die of incarcerated hernias, appendicitis, or perforated intestines. The vast majority of women never get the Cesarean section that they need. If they don't, the baby dies, and the mother may die, also.



Graduation celebration at Banso Baptist Hospital in 2007—Dr. Heuric Rakotomalala (left) and Dr. Chukwodi Okorie (right) with their families, fellow residents, and the residents' families. Dr. Okorie is now Interim Program Director at Banso Baptist Hospital.

Five programs are approved training sites and twenty-one residents are in training at present. PAACS's first surgical specialty training (pediatric and rehabilitative surgery) is beginning at BethanyKids at Kijabe Hospital, Kenya. Two more general surgery programs in Kenya will begin in 2008 and one more in Cameroon in 2009. At least three more hospitals are considering starting programs.

The PAACS programs are in the process of being accredited by the West African College of Surgeons (WACS) and the College of East, Central, and Southern Africa (COSECSA). If fully accredited, PAACS will be the first program in Africa to hold such double accreditation.

The Strategic Position of PAACS

Africa's population, now just under 900 million, is predicted to reach 2 billion by 2050. The PAACS program brings together Christians from around the world to train and disciple African physicians. Applications for admission to the residency come from all over Africa and the graduates will go back to mission and church-run hospitals to supply part of the great need.

PAACS has a stated goal of training 100 surgeons by 2020. This goal is optimistic, but obtainable with the help of surgeons and physicians from around the world. Three dozen short-term faculty have come from the US, Europe, and Australia to help in 2007 alone. Surgeons of every specialty, obstetrician-gynecologists, anesthesi-

ologists, pathologists, radiologists, and gastroenterologists are needed as short-term faculty right now. And it is not just physicians who can help. Pathology technicians, operating room scrub technicians, biomedical engineers, hospital administrators, information technology experts, and Christian workers can all be used to train the residents and help the surgical programs become stronger on many levels.

How You Can Help

"The greatest need for PAACS is prayer," Dr. Thompson states. But he admits that the need for personnel and funding for housing, scholarship stipends, and the necessary travel come right behind it. Three of the PAACS programs in Cameroon have only one surgeon to do all that is needed in order to take care of patients and simultaneously teach, train, and disciple the residents. They need relief and help.

For more information, e-mail: info@paacs.net, or Dr. Dave Thompson: PAACSDirectorAfrica@gmail.com, or Dr. Bruce Steffes: ceo@paacs.net, who provided the basic information and photos for this article.

Top 100 Hospital recruiting top physicians and research scientists

**OPHTHALMOLOGY: Central Texas
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