



KRB Update #2205 – Patient Screening

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You may wonder ‘How does Mercy Ships find the surgical patients in a large country?’ and that is a good question. Our strategy changes from country to country depending on the unique situation of the field service host country. Often, we conduct a large screening in the port city which is often the major city of the country and thousands come. In the case of Madagascar, the ship is located in the main port city of Toamasina, though the population is only 200,000 people – the smallest city we have brought the *Africa Mercy* to. Thus, we need to go out and conduct patient selection/screenings in other cities. Here in Madagascar, we have gone to the capital of Antananarivo and two other cities on the other side of the country – Toliara and Mahajanga.

I wish to tell you more about Mahajanga as I had the privilege of being on the screening team for a week. Mahajanga has the second most important port after Toamasina – it is located in the northwest side of the country. The emblem of the city is the 300 year old baobab tree – *see photo*. The journey from the ship by Land Rover would be about 20-22 hours over two days each way. Though, we are thankful for our partners here in Madagascar - MAF – Mission Aviation Fellowship and our screening team flew and thus the journey was less than two hours. We had nine people on our team including two our local workers/day crew.



Advertisements were made through missionaries, Ministry of Health, local partners, radio, posters and even television announcements. We didn’t know how many people to expect on the first of the three days. After being well received by the hospital director and regional ministry of health representative, we set up in one of the government hospitals. In all 977 potential patients came, 306 were sent to the nurses for in depth screening and 93 were scheduled for surgery this field service. Many people came with problems that we are not able to address on the ship. Since we are returning to the same country, another 100 or so qualified were placed on list for the next field service including pediatric orthopedic kids. I was at the head of the line for crowd control and so had the privilege to greet everyone coming through using my limited Malagasy language and also French. The people were peaceful and for the most part orderly which made my role

easier. I think of Junior who had noma disease when he was young and his face is horrible disfigured. Our plastic reconstructive surgeons will be able to help him. He is 22 years old and comes from a very rural location. Albertine, a mother of two, who is no longer able to work cleaning houses due to the pain from the tumor growing on her face – *see photo*. Our videographer, local partner and I visited her in her home and were able to ask her some questions about her life. When we asked her thoughts about coming to the other side of the country to a ship to receive her surgery, she said “*I am ready to go right now with you.*” That was not possible, but she is arriving today on a bus from Mahajanga with 37 other patients and caregivers. One of my

highlights from screening is for those we are able to say ‘Yes’ to, to see them arrive on the ship and receive their healing and hope restored to their lives. All of us play our part in order for this to happen.

For our second field service here, we plan to go 11 cities, the capital and the port city as we look for the forgotten poor here in this nation. Please pray for each of those who are coming for surgery and for others to have the confidence to come when they receive the news that Mercy Ships may be able to help them. Thank you.

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