



KRB Update #2216 – Return to Benin

Keith R. Brinkman with Mercy Ships

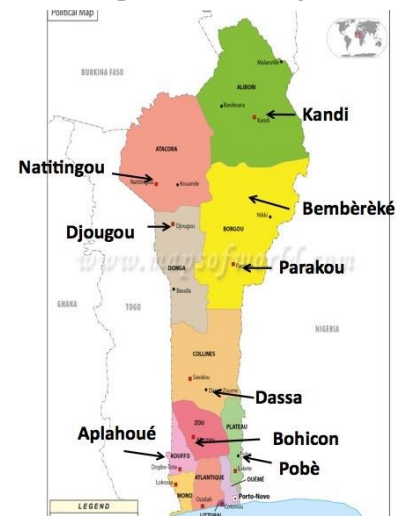
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With great excitement, we the crew on the *m/v Africa Mercy* arrived into the port of Cotonou, Benin and back



to West Africa on 18 August 2016 for a ten-month field service. I was here for all of 2009 and short visits in 2010 and 2012. We are profoundly grateful for the welcome, with the participation of representatives of the government, embassies and other organizations. During the arrival ceremony, Claudine Gbenagnon Talon, First Lady of the Republic of Benin addressed the crew, saying, *“Behind all statistics there is a story, a life, a person who needs a new hope, a treatment, or a cure. I wish that this enriching collaboration of Benin with Mercy Ships will continue to grow year after year for the well-being of the population.”* This is something I believe in – as most of you know I am responsible for reporting out our statistics and reports to our various partners. Weekly when I pull the surgical numbers from the Patient Database, I remember there is a life behind each of our unique surgical patients and also for our training participants.

Over the many years, Mercy Ships has developed various means of obtaining surgical patients. In each country, we modify for what would be best. Here in Benin after three weeks of screening at our Cotonou Screening Center 762 potential patients received appointments to attend individual surgeon screenings where our volunteer surgeons will give the final ok. Small teams of two incorporating technology (using iForms on iPhones) completed screenings during four weeks in nine cities (Kandi, Bembèrèké, Parakou, Natitingou, Djougou, Dassa, Bohicon, Aplahoué, and Pobè – see the map) 489 potential patients received appointments to be seen by Mercy Ships nurses at one of five screening locations in October or in December. Through the Cotonou Screening, interior screening and referrals, Mercy Ships surgical opportunities are now full except for obstetric fistula patients. We are saying many no’s and I am sorry ‘je suis désolé.’ related to surgery. Though, we have been able to say yes to many also. Allow me to share about one patient. His name is Oleg and he is 24 years old. When he was 20 years old, he was in his family home outside of Cotonou when there was a blazing fire and the flames burned his body in the area of his neck, chest, and leg. His father searched and searched to find some medical help as the burns caused restriction of mobility for parts of his body but sadly found none. Years later Oleg heard of the types of surgeries Mercy Ships can provide and he came to the screening. He was accepted and our South African surgeon and the amazing operating team provided surgery for burn scar contracture releases for him. He is now in the healing, wound care (I stayed with him for one session which was over 90 minutes of delicate care) and later on he will enter into the therapy stage. Regretfully his father passed away before seeing his son’s healing. A verse they strongly believe in is: Luc 1:37 “Car rien n'est impossible à Dieu.” “For no word from God will ever fail.” Even though at times, he is home-sick and anxious to leave the hospital, he is so thankful for his healing. I visit him and Olivier, who also incurred his injury and burn four years ago, on a regular basis here in our hospital. A card game they have been introduced to is ‘UNO’ – which helps to pass the time and I have taught them a few additional numbers in Español. I join them for the Sunday morning service which is available to the patients and caregivers and interested crew.



Our care for our patients is not only physical, but for the whole person. When there are emotional and spiritual concerns, our crew and trained local workers are there for our patients – to listen, to pray, to counsel, to stand together with them. Through relationship building, a person opens up and is willing to share more about their life when they know people generally love and care for them. The Bible story shared this morning was of the Good Samaritan and our hospital chaplains use the Simply the Story method of sharing which involves the audience’s participation. One shared his reflection that we see God in the care that the Samaritan offered to the man on the side of the road. *“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers? The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him. Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.” Luke 10:30-37*

Prayer Points: *our patients surgery and recovery *our training participants *safety and health for the crew and local workers *may people sense God’s spirit here on board the *Africa Mercy*

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