

MG9999-005 Where There Is No Doctor June 2016

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Dr. Lee Jae Hoon operates on a child to correct a cleft lip.

The doctors and nurses who volunteer on the MAF Madagascar Medical Safaris (MMS), often remember one patient from the week-long clinic that stands out as especially meaningful to them. On the recent June 2016 MMS, for the two doctors and nurse Julie, it was the same particular woman.

Her name is Memeny, and they knew her from the previous year when the team worked at the Andabotoka clinic. In 2015 the 34-year-old arrived near the end of the week-long clinic. An examination revealed that she suffered from painful uterine myoma, or fibroid tumors, and needed a hysterectomy.

But it was too late. A hysterectomy requires that the patient receive the operation at the beginning of the week so she can be closely monitored for complications before the team must leave. They sadly turned her away. The clinic has no permanent staff that can watch over a patient once the medical safari ends.

"This year she ran and was among the first," Dr. Fernand Ramahalison, the MMS team coordinator explained. "She came to us with enough strength, and we checked and we said, yea, we can do this surgery. And by the time she left...wow! She walked around the hospital. It was a very big pleasure to see. She was very happy to go home because she had suffered a lot. Pain. Bleeding. It was this size!" He holds up his hands indicating about 15 cm.

Where There Is No Doctor

Together with our partners, MAF Madagascar organizes the week-long medical trips to remote villages to overcome the medical needs in these areas. During an MMS visit, MAF flies a medical team in and out of the villages, free of charge, and ensures that medicines are available for these bush clinics. Hundreds of patients receive medical consultations and many people also receive surgery during the one-week clinic. This adds up to thousands of patients and hundreds of surgeries per year and many lives saved.

The outreach only takes place in areas where there is no medical help available. This year MAF will be flying 21 safaris with more partners, combining flights to similar regions where they drop off a team in one place, and pick up another team in a different location, maximizing the flights.



The clinic at Andabotoka is an hour drive from the airstrip on a rough road.

The June clinic required an 80-minute flight to the town of Maintirano on the coast, west of the capital Antananarivo. In the dry season in a private 4x4, it takes two days to drive, leaving at 4 am and driving until 8 pm the first day, then continuing until 5 pm the next day. In the wet season it's much longer.

From Maintirano it's a one-hour drive on disintegrating semi-tarmac or dirt roads to the clinic at Andabotoka, past small traditional villages of mud and stick homes with thatched roofs. The clinic is a white and blue painted concrete building of about eight small rooms used for the surgeries, prep, dispensing medicine, and consultations. During the week-long medical safari, a crowd of men, women and children fill the area in front of the building, sitting on the concrete verandah, on the ground, on the ruins of another building, under trees. When the team of doctors and nurses leave, so do the people. There's little medical help here once they are gone.



A child receives a hernia operation while Dr. Fernand manages the anesthetic drug.

Teamwork

The two team doctors include Dr. Fernand who helps to coordinate the quarterly MAF trips, and Dr. Lee Jae Hoon, the surgeon.

“I was the first to open this kind of mission here with MAF 11 years ago,” Dr. Fernand explains. “I went to the east. A few years after mine, Dr. Lee started in the south. He’s a surgeon. I was just a generalist. So Jacob, the former director of MAF, made us meet together and it was an opportunity for us to see if we could combine our ability to make the mission more effective.”

During the medical safaris, Dr. Fernand acts as the anesthesiologist for the surgeries, performs dental extractions, consultations if needed, and other various jobs. “I’m the one who can fill the gap in the team,” he says.

On average Dr. Lee performs six to seven main surgeries per day including for hernia, facial abscess, cleft lip, lipoma, hydrocele, and circumcision, a procedure important to Malagasy people. Hernias are often seen in older children who have suffered with the condition since birth and no opportunity for surgery.



A woman is registered while a crowd of patients wait around the clinic and under trees to see a doctor or nurse.

Tired but Blessed

“I’m a little bit tired, but I enjoy it,” Dr. Lee says as he arrives back at the MAF hanger in the capital and is offered a fresh cup of coffee by Marie-Ange, MAF’s office cleaner. “Since I was young I love to go to rural areas to serve as a surgeon. I really enjoy this adventure. But actually as a missionary, this is a good opportunity to share the gospel. That is our priority. We work very hard, and through the work the people’s hearts are already ready to receive whatever we share.”

Dr. Fernand also admits to feeling tired at the end of these safaris to the bush where they sleep in tents near the clinic and work long hours.

“Helping people is always making the team very joyful because when we work there as a mission. We see that it’s really a need for people,” he describes. “People have waited for a long time and it’s an opportunity

for us to really help them. Any surgery is very, very exciting for us, even for a cleft lip. One young girl was 19 years old. She had her cleft lip since birth, and after the surgery you saw her very smiling. It's a very, very good opportunity and joyful for us."



Julie Ramanantenasoa, a nurse on her eighth medical safari with MAF, feels blessed to help her people.

Gratitude and Reward

The people receiving medical care from the team feel gratitude that shows through their gifts, a sacrifice when you have very little.

"In Andabotoka where we have been, we ate a *lot* of chicken and ducks because everyone brought us chicken and ducks, rice, fruits, coconut. We didn't buy it," Dr. Fernand points out. "They just gave it to us. They are very poor so it shows their gratitude. When you see them bring in this, and they just take it from their goods and give it to us, it's a big reward for us."

Julie Ramanantenasoa, a nurse on her eighth medical safari with MAF, considers herself the blessed one to be able to serve her people in remote areas. "I'm very thankful to God because he gave me this opportunity. Sometimes there aren't doctors in the area, so they are suffering and we want to help them. To serve the people, to serve God, it's a very big grace for me."

For 11 years now, Dr. Fernand has traveled on these medical safaris, roughing it for a week at a time away from the comforts of home and family, seeing similar medical conditions over and over.

"It's not like in town where it's routine," Dr. Fernand muses. "When you see the people, you see it's a big need. It feels new every time."



Patients wait at the clinic to be seen by a nurse or doctor, holding their medical history cards.



The MAF Caravan lands at the coastal town of Maintirano, an 80-minute flight or several days by car.



A mother signs documents before surgery on her child's cleft lip.



Pilot Josh Plett hangs out with children at the clinic.



Drs. Lee Jae Hoon and Fernand Ramahalison arrive back in the capital after the week-long medical safari.

MMS team members interviewed:

Dr. Fernand René Olivier Ramahalison – MMS team coordinator

Dr. Lee Jae Hoon – Surgeon

Julie Ramanantenasoa - Nurse

No statistics or photos provided for this MMS from medical team.