



Embassy of the United States of America
Public Affairs Office

PRESS RELEASE

Freetown

September 1, 2011

Contact: Mark Carr

Tel: 076 515 000

U.S. Surgeons Saving Lives in Partnership with Connaught Hospital

On September 1, United States Ambassador Michael S. Owen toured Connaught Hospital in Freetown, where American surgeons have been working in partnership with their Sierra Leonean counterparts since 2008 to improve standards of medical care. Ambassador Owen noted that “a good public health system is one of the cornerstones of development.” He said that “it is extremely encouraging to see the good work that these courageous medical professionals are performing on a daily basis, often under very difficult conditions.”

Surgeons OverSeas (SOS) is a New York.-based NGO that was founded in 2007 by U.S. surgeons Peter Kingham and Adam Kushner with a mission of “Saving lives in developing countries by improving surgical care.” SOS currently has more than 190 members in over 25 countries around the world. SOS doctors work directly with their host country counterparts, conduct research into the global burden of surgical disease, and also advocate for universal access to surgery to be included on the global health agenda.

SOS staff observed that, in the developing world, a young woman in labor, a young child with appendicitis, or a young man with a broken leg may die simply because of their inability to find adequate surgical care. Such people are seldom served by hospitals, and even if they are, the hospital staff is often untrained and suffering from a severe lack of tools and resources. Furthermore, even if patients can find a qualified surgeon, families must often provide necessary supplies: gauze, IVs, a scalpel, sutures, and sterile gloves. The result is that far too often people die or are left disabled from conditions that could have been addressed with simple and cost-effective cures -- if they had been available.

The SOS program in Sierra Leone began in February 2008 when SOS co-founder Dr. Peter Kingham and Sierra Leone surgeon Dr. TB Kamara, Connaught Hospital Care Manager and Chief of Surgery, assessed 10 Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MOHS) hospitals throughout the country. These assessments helped Drs. Kingham and Kamara develop strategies to address deficiencies in supplies, equipment, training and personnel.

To date, the SOS program in Sierra Leone has:

- Provided two containers of medical and surgical supplies and equipment;
- Assisted local surgeons to conduct emergency surgery workshops;
- Temporarily assisted with salary support of Connaught Hospital surgical care staff until salaries were increased by the MOHS;
- Provided HIV protective items to operating theater staff at Connaught Hospital;
- Assisted with the development of a post graduate surgical training program;
- Conducted review sessions for junior doctors studying for the West African College of Surgeons primary examination;
- Committed to support surgical registrars who begin post graduate training in Sierra Leone;
- Spearheaded development of a mass casualty exercise along with the Office of National Security (ONS).
- Assisted with a limited number of volunteer surgeons and doctors to provide direct patient care and teaching;
- Collaborated in writing multiple academic papers that have been published in peer-reviewed medical journals which highlight the needs and interventions in Sierra Leone.

The current SOS mission in Sierra Leone involves:

- Tutoring junior doctors in advance of the West African College of Surgeons primary examination;
- Undertaking a pilot test survey to understand the burden of surgical disease;
- Repeating the initial assessment of surgical capacity in government hospitals;
- Sponsoring a “Health and Safety in the Surgical Workplace” seminar for operating theater staff at government hospitals.

The American surgeons emphasized that SOS closely coordinates all of its programs with local surgeons and the Ministry of Health. SOS projects are collaborative and -- in an effort to promote sustainability -- ensure that local surgeons lead the efforts and are involved in all decisions.

SOS staff were also careful to highlight that -- although there is still much that needs to be done to improve surgical care in Sierra Leone -- there have been many improvements. Since SOS began its partnership with Connaught Hospital, the most promising results have included:

- A 300% increase in major operations;
- Initiation of daily morning handover meetings and quality assurance conferences;
- Establishment of an intensive care unit;
- Opening of a hospital annex and private ward;
- Addition of a CT scanner;
- Installation of running water;
- Increased access to electricity and improved reliability of back-up generator;
- Compressed cylinder oxygen and use of anesthesia machines;
- Efforts to begin post-graduate surgical training.

The standard SOS program model includes a surgical capacity assessment with local partners and the Ministry of Health, and then tailoring interventions to meet the identified needs. SOS has been involved in projects in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Malawi and is looking to expand to other low and middle income countries in the coming years. To learn more about the mission and history of Surgeons OverSeas, see <http://www.humanitariansurgery.org/>. For additional information or questions about SOS programs in Sierra Leone contact Adam L. Kushner, MD, MPH, FACS at adamkushner@yahoo.com or on +232(0)78-61-9775.