

Rotary Intl, Mercy Ships to deliver medical care to West Africa

A strategic partnership between Rotary International and the global charity Mercy Ships will improve the delivery of vital health care services throughout West Africa.

Through the partnership, The Rotary Foundation, Rotary's charitable arm, will provide grants to Rotary clubs and districts to assemble vocational training teams of medical professionals. The teams will work with Mercy Ships medical staff to perform or assist in life-changing surgeries. The Rotary volunteers also will share their expertise through training programs aimed at enhancing the skills of local health care professionals.

The partnership first focuses on West Africa, where the Mercy Ships flagship, the Africa Mercy, is now based in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Grants will be implemented in the coming months, and the first Rotary teams are expected to be in West Africa by early 2012.

Health care training and capacity building for local hospitals is a major focus for Mercy Ships. Mercy Ships will work with Rotary to attract Rotarians from all over the world to help perform vocational training of surgeons and ancillary staff on the Africa Mercy as well as in local hospitals and facilities. Operated by Mercy Ships, the Africa Mercy is an ideal training platform with a controlled environment and a steady flow of patients.

"The need for top quality health care is great throughout West Africa, where far too many families lack access to hospitals, doctors nurses, dentists and other health professionals," said Rotary Foundation vice-chair Sam Okudzeto, of Accra, Ghana.

"Daily, we learn of expectant mothers and children dying from ailments that can easily be cured if health facilities are available. The partnership between Rotary and Mercy Ships leverages the strengths of both organisations to significantly address this disparity between need and access. I am sure many lives will be saved and quality of life will improve by this intervention." continues Okudzeto.

"Mercy Ships is honored to be chosen as a strategic partner for Rotary's focus on disease prevention and treatment," said Mercy Ships president and founder Don Stephens. "The scope of Rotary's service to humanity is truly monumental, and it is my belief that the synergy of our organizations working together will be an even greater force to improve health care delivery systems in West Africa."

The Rotary Foundation of Rotary International, under its new Future Vision plan, seeks to forge strategic partnerships with established organisations with expertise in any of Rotary's six areas of focus: peace and conflict prevention/resolution;

disease prevention and treatment; water and sanitation; maternal and child health; basic education and literacy; and economic and community development. The foundation grants support major international projects with sustainable, high impact outcomes.

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