BACKGROUND

For almost two decades, the John A. Moran Eye Center (JMEC) team has been involved in training physicians and staff at the Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital (KATH) in Kumasi, Ghana. This long-lasting relationship began with Dr. Alan Crandall and his desire to help people suffering from vision loss across the globe. Twenty years ago, when one of his patients asked him to restore sight to a relative in Ghana, he simply could not say no. Dr. Crandall traveled to Ghana, treated the patient, and saw the overwhelming need for eye care in the country. Only 74 ophthalmologists reside in Ghana. Out of the country’s 34 million citizens, 240,000 suffer from blindness. Many of the 74 ophthalmologists are concentrated in Kumasi or Accra, leaving people in rural areas with limited access to eye care.

After Dr. Crandall’s first trip to Ghana, he returned with a team from Moran every year to provide free eye surgeries, train surgeons, and donate medical supplies. Today, the collaboration between JMEC and KATH has grown to include mentoring promising ophthalmologists at the Moran Eye Center in Salt Lake City through the International Observer Program, traveling to Kumasi to offer hands-on training at KATH facilities, and partnering with Ghanian ophthalmologists to do outreach medical eye camps in remote parts of the country.

In late February 2014, a team from JMEC traveled to Kumasi to attend the highly anticipated inauguration ceremony of KATH’s very own Eye Centre, the successful result of a twenty-year collaboration between Moran and Ghanian eye care professionals. With financial aid from the United States Agency for International Development, ORBIS International, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the Himalayan Cataract Project and continued academic support from JMEC, KATH opened its doors on February 25, 2014. State-of-the-art diagnostic and treatment equipment, coupled with highly trained eye care professionals, will revolutionize eye care in Ghana and bring vision to those with curable blindness. The KATH Eye Centre will also serve as a training and research center for ophthalmology in Ghana and West Africa.

THE TEAM

MORAN PHYSICIANS AND STAFF

- Julie Crandall, COA, Outreach Division Project Coordinator
- Tara Kisow, International Observer Program Coordinator
- Geoffrey Tabin, MD, International Division Co-director
- Benjamin Thomas, MD, Moran International Fellow

DAY BY DAY

FEBRUARY 18-24, 2014

The Moran team arrived in Kumasi ready to hit the ground running. The Eye Centre at KATH opened its doors early to treat patients who had been identified with blinding eye diseases in a rural screening done earlier that week. Dr. Tabin and his international fellow, Dr. Benjamin Thomas, worked side-by-side with KATH ophthalmologists to restore sight to the patients. Dr. Tabin performed complex surgeries while teaching KATH surgeons his techniques. He also followed up with alumni from Moran’s International Observer Program, making sure their surgical techniques were correct and efficient. By the end of the week, Drs. Tabin and Thomas examined over 100 patients and completed more than 15 sight-restoring surgeries.

Julie Crandall, COA, spent countless hours in the Eye Centre’s operating facility training nurses and ophthalmic technicians how to use their new equipment and introduced efficiency models to help the KATH staff sustain the anticipated high volume of patients. She also participated in screening patients and assisted in the operating room during many cases.
Tara Kisow, International Observer Program Coordinator, met with the Eye Centre’s business managers to organize a medical student exchange program. Medical students from KATH will complete a short ophthalmology rotation at JMEC in Salt Lake City to increase awareness and interest in ophthalmology. In a country with approximately one ophthalmologist per 500,000 people, the need for more ophthalmologists is critical.

Tara also finalized plans for KATH’s Dr. Doreen Fempong to complete a pediatric ophthalmology observership at the Moran Eye Center with Dr. Robert Hoffman in March and April 2014. Ghana has only two pediatric ophthalmologists, with an additional two in training (including Dr. Frempong), for the country’s 11 million children. According to KATH Eye Centre’s pediatric ophthalmologist, Dr. Peter Osei Bonsu, more than 6,500 of those children are completely blind (excluding refraction errors). With early pediatric screenings and preventive eye care, many of these children could have avoided blindness.

FEBRUARY 25, 2014
On Tuesday, February 25, more than 300 people arrived at KATH’s new Eye Centre for the inauguration ceremony. Attendees included many of the country’s dignitaries, such as the Ghanian Minister of Health, Ms. Sherry Ayittei. She declared blindness a “huge country-wide burden that needs to be strategically tackled.” Ms. Ayittei specifically applauded the dedication of the Moran Eye Center team to KATH. Both Dr. Tabin and Julie Crandall addressed the crowd, congratulating KATH on the opening of their new Eye Centre and expressing Moran’s commitment to training and educating eye care professionals in Ghana. Awards were presented to Moran physicians Drs. Geoffrey Tabin, Alan Crandall, and Robert Hoffman, recognizing the positive impact they have made on eye care in the country. After the ribbon-cutting ceremony, the hospital was declared “officially open,” and attendees toured the facilities, which include clinics, three operating rooms with five tables, recovery rooms, an optical shop, and a pharmacy. The KATH Eye Centre is now one of only two eye hospitals in the entire country. The JMEC team plans to return in May 2014.