In July Moran conducted its second 6,200-mile trek from Salt Lake City to Pohnpei, Micronesia, setting up an Outreach Medical Eye Camp (OMEC) at Pohnpei State Hospital and performing hundreds of screenings and surgeries. Additionally, Moran continued its work with Dr. Padwick Gallin, who will complete his residency in Fiji in December and become the first Micronesian ophthalmologist, ever.

**SUMMARY**

**Blindness in Paradise**

In Micronesia, 110,000 people inhabit 70 islands out of a chain of 607. As in many developing countries, the blazing sun and light reflected off the water contribute to a high incidence of cataracts and pterygiums—a scarring growth that gradually covers the front of the eye. Unfortunately, in Micronesia, wearing protective sunglasses goes against the cultural norm; in fact, it is seen as a sign “putting on airs,” making eye protection a constant challenge. We have also learned that a number of traumatic cataracts in younger patients are often a result of a tendency toward physical altercations. Diabetes, leading to diabetic retinopathy, is also a major issue, and patients have to rely on outside teams to administer laser treatments. With each experience in Micronesia we learn more about the culture and the conditions that escalate serious eye problems.
Unique Community Challenges

Conditions in the hospital are basic, there is no air conditioning, and families cook on portable stoves throughout the inpatient ward. On the positive side, our staff has come to admire and appreciate the local sense of humor and genuine caring that family members show for one another. Numerous elderly patients were led into the hospital by grandchildren, and though many were quite stoic, we were able to develop a great rapport with a lot of the patients. Slowly, the local myth that “they take your eye out” at these OMECs is fading.

Future Plans

One of our goals is to make a career as an eye care professional in Micronesia an appealing prospect by encouraging citizens with the means to pay for eye care to stay in the country rather than going off-island. Basic small incision cataract surgery (SICS) is generally not acceptable to those who can afford more advanced techniques. To that end, we have purchased a phaco machine for Dr. Gallin and will be training him to use it. In addition, the Pohnpei Rotary Club and our local Sugarhouse Rotary are working on a grant that will allow aspiring ophthalmic techs to travel to Moran for training.

Brothers Reconciled: Elijah and Tonasito

A pair of young brothers in their twenties, Tonasito and Elijah, arrived at the clinic together. Elijah was completely blind in one eye from a traumatic cataract and had difficulty seeing at all. When asked how long he’d been unable to see, Elijah said nothing—but Tonasito replied, “two years and two months,” and tearfully explained that he had hit his brother in a fit of anger. Elijah remained silent. Clearly, both brothers were suffering a great deal, carrying the burden of this blindness between them. Moran surgeons were able to completely restore Elijah’s sight, and the next day there were more tears, but this time with joyful laughter from both brothers.