In February 2016, the Moran global outreach team traveled to Dodoma, Tanzania for their first large-scale outreach medical eye camp in the country. It provided a significant opportunity to collaborate with Tanzanian ophthalmologist, Dr. Frank Sandi, at the Benjamin Mkapa Hospital, run by the University of Dodoma’s College of Health. The mission was a huge success, with 2,200 vision screenings and 221 sight-restoring surgeries completed, along with over 800 pairs of glasses distributed to men, women, and children in need.

**See the need**

Tanzania, an African country rich in natural beauty and culture, is one of the fiscally poorest counties in the world. According to the World Bank, the average working Tanzanian earns $1,200 per year—one of the lowest earning levels in the world. This means that a one-income family must survive on approximately $3.28 per day.

Vision care is of particular concern in this country. It is estimated that over one percent of the population is blind, which equates to nearly 500,000 people. Most of the country’s blind citizens could be cured with a simple cataract surgery. Unfortunately, Tanzania is home to only 27 ophthalmologists for 50 million residents.

To tackle the nation’s backlog of curable blindness, Moran’s global outreach team, partnering with the Weill Cornell Medical College, has committed to work with Tanzanian ophthalmologist, Dr. Frank Sandi.

**Site:** Dodoma, Tanzania.

**Partners:** Dr. Frank Sandi, University of Dodoma College of Health, Benjamin Mkapa Hospital; Cornell University, Weill Cornell Medical College.

**Medical Team:** 6 surgeons, Drs. Charles Cole, Alan Crandall, Roger Furlong, Edward Lai, Jeff Petrey, Grace Sun; 1 physician’s assistant, Nicole Papworth; 2 nurses, Carolyn Chappell, Lisa Williamson; 6 ophthalmic technicians, Karen Bachman, Dana Dillon, Windy Hasson, Amanda Mayhew, Lori McCoy, Abbey Schwab; 1 surgical technician, Kylie Wack.

**Moran Staff & Volunteers:** Joshua Cooper, Jake Dickey, Heidi Furlong, Jill Miller, Chandler Thompson, Dan Williamson, Michael Yei.

**Sponsors:** Oertli Switzerland, Alcon, Abbott, MST, SEE International, Dubs Scrubs, Glaukos, IOP Ophthalmics, Epsilon.

**Patient Impact:** 221 sight-restoring surgeries, 2,200 vision screenings, 800 pairs of glasses distributed.

**Partner Training:** Dr. Frank Sandi and his staff received a week of hands-on teaching and training from the Moran team.

Patients travel by foot from surrounding villages for the rare opportunity to receive sight-restoring surgeries.
Beginning with this trip, the Moran team will travel to Tanzania to provide ophthalmic teaching and trainings and perform large-scale outreach medical eye camps (OMECs) on a yearly basis.

**Inaugural mission**

In mid-February 2016, the Moran team began the arduous journey to Dodoma, Tanzania. After two long days of flights, airport transfers, and ground shuttles across bumpy dirt roads, the team finally arrived. They hit the ground running and did not miss a beat. After unloading trucks of medical equipment and dozens of large duffle bags full of critical supplies, the Benjamin Mkapa Hospital's operating rooms were transformed to efficiently run multiple operating tables at the same time, and the exterior rooms were set up to screen and treat the hundreds of patients who would soon arrive.

One week prior to the kick-off of the OMEC, a pre-screening team from the Moran ventured into the remote villages to screen and schedule patients for free eye surgeries. **Incredibly, over 2,000 villagers were screened by this group in less than one week!**

Working long days, the team performed 221 surgeries and distributed over 800 pairs of glasses to those with visual impairments. Throughout the week, the Moran team worked side-by-side with Dr. Sandi and his medical staff to transfer as many medical and surgical skills as possible.

The mission was a welcome success, and it put a small dent in the backlog of curable blindness in Tanzania. The team will return in February of 2017 to continue Moran’s work.

**Walking sticks—a need of the past**

After receiving her sight-restoring cataract surgery, one OMEC patient dropped her old walking stick by the clinic door on her way out. She looked at the team and said, **“I am leaving my stick here. I can see, and don’t need it anymore.”**

In the rural villages outside of Tanzania’s capital city, navigating by foot is quite a challenge for the blind. Roads are not paved, hills are steep, and dangerous obstacles are everywhere. As a result, the blind are often immobilized and left to sit in their huts where they are safe from hazards.

When it is necessary to leave, many are led through their villages by a sighted individual holding one end of a walking stick, while the blind individual holds the other end.

By the end of the weeklong mission, a pile of walking sticks had accumulated by the clinic door. Patients who were led into surgery no longer needed them, as they were free to navigate home on their own—no help necessary.

**Returning to School**

Restored sight means restored independence, and in rural Tanzania, it means restored life. Moran surgeons restored clear sight to an 11-year-old girl named Judith, who was going blind from an old eye injury. Judith can now go back to school, and so can her sister, who used to have to stay home to help care for her. The World Health Organization estimates that for every single blind person cured, 2.5 people can return to productivity.
Reflections from the field

*Shared by Moran outreach volunteer, Chandler Thompson*

A gentleman was brought to me to be transferred to the operating room for his surgery. He appeared to be fairly young, so I was shocked to see that both of his eyes were completely enveloped in white cataracts with no trauma to explain his condition. He was only 35 years old, yet completely blind from a condition we cure every day in the United States.

This young man was the main caregiver for his elderly mother and sold the fruit and vegetables that they grew to earn a living for the family. With cataracts covering both eyes, it was becoming increasingly difficult to care for his family and sell his goods at the market.

I took his hand in mine as we began the walk to the surgical suite. The hallway was filled with families and patients waiting for surgeries, so we navigated slowly—one step at a time. Though we exchanged no words, I felt his trust in me. Somehow, he knew I would get him there safely.

I later received word that our lead surgeon, Dr. Alan Crandall, had made the decision to operate on both of his eyes, making this patient our first and only bilateral case of the mission.

The next morning, this young man sat silently among the other patients, waiting for his post-operative exam, unsure of what was to come when his eye patches came off. The doctor removed both of his eye patches, yet his eyes remained shut. Dr. Crandall gently encouraged him to open his eyes, and as he did, we all held our breath. He slowly blinked his dark brown eyes as an interpreter asked him if he could see. Silently, he nodded his head and gave a slow, wide smile in recognition.

Have you ever seen someone’s life change in an instant? That is the gift that the Moran outreach team gives to people around the globe. A 35-year-old young man shared his joy with us. He could now return to caring for his mother and see his niece for the first time in years—all because of a team with the skills and passion to continue giving back to others.