In February 2017, the Moran global outreach team returned to Dodoma, Tanzania for their second outreach medical eye camp (OMEC) in the region. By the end of the OMEC, the team completed 420 sight-restoring surgeries and over 2,500 free vision screenings. Along with delivering much-needed eye care to the region, Moran physicians worked side by side with local Tanzanian ophthalmologist, Frank Sandi, MD, to provide teaching and surgical training to him and his staff throughout the entire mission.

See the need
Tanzania is one of the largest and poorest countries in East Africa. While the country has an overabundance of natural resources, its people lack the basic resources needed for survival. The World Bank reports that Tanzanians have one of the lowest earning levels in the world. Most single-income families survive on just over $3.25 per day.

With a life expectancy of slightly over 60 years, the country’s citizens are in great need of medical attention, including vision care. It is estimated that over one percent of Tanzania’s population is blind, which equates to nearly 500,000 people. Most of the blind could be cured with a simple cataract surgery. This is where the Moran team is helping.

Partnering with local ophthalmologist, Frank Sandi, the Moran team is working to eradicate the backlog of curable blindness in Tanzania through yearly surgical missions. Not only do hundreds of locals receive free sight-restoring surgeries during these missions, the Moran team also delivers ophthalmic teaching and trainings at the Benjamin Mkapa Ultramodern Hospital.
Sustainability through education

Moran physician, Jeff Pettey, kicked off the team’s work in Dodoma in 2014. Since then, he has focused the yearly missions around ophthalmic trainings with Sandi and his staff. Pettey’s ultimate goal is to help train enough providers so that Tanzanian doctors can start caring for their own population—and do it well.

After years of collaboration between the John A. Moran Eye Center, the Weill Cornell Medical College, and the University of Dodoma, the Benjamin Mkapa Ultramodern Hospital in Dodoma has recently been approved to create the Tanzanian government’s first ophthalmology residency program. This is a huge step forward for the country, where fewer than 40 ophthalmologists reside amongst more than 50 million citizens.

Sandi will take leadership of this newly created residency program. Through several donations from partners across the globe, his hospital has received enough equipment donations to allow the residency program to accept its first class within the next year. Pettey, representing the Moran Eye Center, and Grace Sun, MD, representing Weill Cornell Medical College, will work closely with Sandi to provide direction for the program.

In addition to helping to develop the ophthalmology residency program in Dodoma, the Moran team will be training Tanzanian medical providers at their main center in Salt Lake City, Utah. Tanzanian ophthalmologist, Christopher Mwananasao, MD, from the Mwanza region, is scheduled for a leadership-development and academic ophthalmology training program in late 2017.

A family back in action

The Moran team met father and son Samuel and Simoni Stiven in the remote village of Chamwino during their pre-screening mission. Samuel had developed a cataract in his right eye nearly three years ago, and the vision in his left eye had slowly degenerated due to an injury. Unfortunately, Simoni had also lost his vision due to cataracts. Simoni’s situation became much worse when he lost his hearing at only 22 years old.

As a single father, Samuel has taken care of his son’s every need since he was born. He helps Simoni with everyday tasks—eating, drinking, getting dressed—while also working on his farm to provide for his family. When Samuel learned about the possibility of restored sight for both him and his son, his spirits lifted immensely. He spoke about the freedom he would gain if both of them could one day see again.

The father and son pair received free cataract surgeries from the Moran team during the Dodoma OMEC. With their renewed sight, they are now back in action working on their farm. Both have a much brighter outlook for their futures. Samuel hopes that his son will now be able to marry and have a family of his own one day.

Renewed vision means returning to school

At only seven years old, Joel Williams developed a congenital cataract in his left eye. He struggled with his vision loss for five years, until the Moran pre-screening team met him in his village just outside of Dodoma. Days later, he and his father traveled to the Benjamin Mkapa Ultramodern Hospital for Joel’s sight-restoring surgery. Joel was nervous and afraid, however Moran’s compassionate surgical team quickly eased his nerves, and they successfully removed his cataract. Joel will be able to return to school with a newfound confidence in his ability to read and learn. Now he will receive the education he deserves.