

So Much Remains to be Done

Kelly McQueen, M.D., M.P.H., Phoenix, Arizona

Unbelievably, it has been ten years since I completed my residency at Mayo Scottsdale. Growing up, I had this unrealistic, romantic goal of being the kind of doctor I imagined Amelia Earhart would have been if she had pursued medicine. Now, looking back on my medical career to date, it has certainly followed a path less traveled, but it has been guided by altruistic goals and surprisingly, to some extent, has followed my childhood ideals.

Immediately after residency, I volunteered to serve in the American Society of Anesthesiologist's Overseas Teaching Program in Tanzania¹. We taught nurses and medics how to give anesthetics - an expertise desperately needed in remote areas of this country. The enthusiastic and grateful students

I initially worked exclusively at the Barrow's Neurological Institute. At first, the challenges of this new clinical practice and the looming oral boards kept me busy and intellectually stimulated. Soon, however, the nagging desire to volunteer and to help others overseas was to return. VAC was generous and big enough to support this commitment. For the next few years, I worked in China, Jordan, Brazil, and Peru providing anesthesia for children undergoing cleft lip and palette surgery with Operation Smile².

In late 2002, the charity, Doctors without Borders³, sent me to northern Sri Lanka. This organization had a hospital just behind the front lines of a twenty-year-old civil war between the Sri Lankan government and Tamil separatists. Before arrival, I was told that conditions were "basic." In fact, they were much worse. We cared for civilians who were land-mine victims or subject to other trauma and parturients needing surgical delivery in a bombed out hospital patched up with United Nations' blue tarps. Electricity was only available when the generator worked, and our anesthesia equipment was completely unreliable. Ketamine and/or regional anesthetic blocks became the mainstay of my practice.

My experience in Sri Lanka completely changed my perspective on the work of humanitarian aid agencies and their countless selfless volunteers. I became convinced that new and additional resources were desperately needed in crisis situations to prevent unnecessary deaths and suffering.



Operation Smile trip to China

I encountered confirmed my convictions that working overseas was a laudable goal. Returning to the States, I completed a fellowship in OB Anesthesia at Mayo Clinic Rochester and then joined Valley Anesthesiology Consultants (VAC) in Phoenix. Within this large and diverse practice,



Dr. McQueen with one of her Operation Smile patients.

When I returned to the United States, I resolved that I would do my part to change the system if possible. I applied to several public health programs which focused on international health and humanitarian aid and was fortunate to be accepted by the Harvard School of Public Health. My studies for a master's degree focused on international health and international humanitarian aid law. After graduation, I was then awarded a fellowship by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in Washington, DC⁴. This fellowship program is designed to provide scientific and technical expertise and support to congressional offices and government agencies. The fellowship I chose focused on global health security and policy. Over the next twelve months, I had the opportunity to interact with many intera-

gency committees addressing issues such as vaccine technology, disaster planning, bioterrorism, and other international threats to public health. Halfway through the program, I also began working with the Mexican government on border health issues and bioterrorism planning. This led me to organize a Latin American conference on these issues and initiate collaborative discussions in the region. The conference took place in September, 2003, in Guernavaca, Mexico.

The AAAS fellowship advanced my understanding of the US Government's role in humanitarian aid and disaster relief. It also provided innumerable contacts for future domestic and international projects. Now, I am back in Arizona and planning to get married later this year. I have returned to work for the Valley Anesthesiology Consultant group. The flexibility and generosity of this group allows me to practice anesthesia for three days a week and consult on public health issues two days a week. I am currently teaching a section on Health Emergencies in Large Populations to the International Committee of the Red Cross. I am a member of the Arizona Red Cross and the Arizona Disaster Management Assistance Team. I also serve on the Arizona Medical Association Committee for Public Health and on the Board of the Arizona Society of Anesthesiologists. While doing this, I still participate in short-term medical missions and disaster relief. I have had the privilege to help, but so much remains to be done.

1. www.asahq.org/Newsletters/1996/11_96/Feature2.html
2. www.operationsmile.org
3. www.doctorswithoutborders.com
4. www.aaas.org/news/releases/2002/0502nti.shtml