

WORKING ON A MERCY SHIP

I have been working **2-3 weeks annually** as a volunteer anaesthetist on board a Mercy Ship in West Africa for the past 20 years. During this time I have had the privilege of visiting 10 different African countries. Mercy Ships is an International Christian charity which uses specially converted ships to provide free surgery for people in some of the poorest countries in the World. Current operations in the six fully equipped operating theatres on board the 16,700 tonne include maxillofacial, ophthalmic, orthopaedic, plastic and VVF repair.

Over the years I have done extra sessions (PAs) or taken study leave, unpaid leave or professional leave to gain extra time off. I have always financed myself – the current cost including a return flight to Africa and ‘crew fees’ on board the Africa Mercy for a 3 week stint is about 1000 GBP but great value. None of the 400+ volunteers on board the ship are paid, in fact all from the Captain to the deckhands have to pay to be there. Accounts of my adventures can be found on

Each of the six operating rooms was recently equipped with a new anaesthesia machine, new monitors will also be installed before the start of the Sierra Leone outreach in **February 2011**. There is a good supply of anaesthetic drugs and disposables. Fibrescopes are readily available. The minimum time for an anaesthetist on board (SHO to Consultant) is two weeks but I recommend at least three for a first visit. The ship is fully air conditioned and very secure with Gurkha guards, bar-coded name badges and 3 meals a day provided by the galley staff.

Mercy Ships Application process:

1. Fill in forms obtainable from www.mercyships.org or from the UK office, The Lighthouse, 12 Meadway Court, Stevenage SG1 2EF tel: 01438727800
2. The completed application form must be posted to the USA office P.O. Box 2020 Garden Valley, Texas 75771-2020 Once accepted, mutually acceptable dates are discussed.

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