

Biomedics Volunteer at Home, Abroad

Kelly Brown

Walking into the emergency room, he found the smell nauseating. There were equipment and parts of equipment strewn everywhere. It wasn't what Brad Carrott had been expecting. But then again, this wasn't your ordinary hospital. In fact, Carrott was in Romania.

Brad Carrott isn't your average biomed either. In his 27 years in the profession, Carrott has traveled to Mongolia, Vietnam, Africa, Russia, and Romania. He volunteers his time to help a group called Assist International test, calibrate, and install medical equipment for hospitals in need all over the world.

Struggling hospitals abroad contact Assist International with requests for medical equipment, which is usually donated by a major American hospital or corporation. Assist International then gathers a team of volunteers that include engineers, doctors, and nurses to install equipment and educate health care personnel abroad. Carrott, chief of biomedical services at Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital in California, has been working with the organization since they first started 14 years ago.

"When I began working with Assist International there weren't a lot of organizations out there like it. For the last 14 years I've gone on as many as three trips a year. Through the years I've encouraged hospitals to support their biomedics and nurses to



Brad Carrott teaches a local Mongolian during the installation of a cardiac care monitoring system at the National Hospital in Ulaanbaatar. The system is the only "state of the art" monitoring system servicing the people of Mongolia.

participate in programs overseas to teach and help those in need," Carrott said.

Although volunteering to go on these trips is something close to Carrott's heart, he realizes that not everybody can do what he does. He admits that it's difficult to be away from family, and it's not always easy financially for biomedics to take leave. For Carrott, however, the rewards outweigh the drawbacks.

"It's nice to do something in your field that makes a difference, especially when you can go out there and do something like this. You work in unhealthy conditions and face tough communication barriers. But you leave them with tools they need. It kind of keeps you humble," he said.

Jim Moore is also using his talents to give medical assistance abroad

through World Medical Mission, a medical relief program run by Samaritan's Purse. He worked as a hospital biomed for 22 years.

After developing a reputation for voluntarily repairing equipment headed overseas in his spare time, he was asked by Samaritan's Purse to join their team full-time. His job now includes contacting companies about donating medical equipment, educating donors on what they can and cannot use in foreign countries, and taking the repaired equipment overseas.

"I was the kind of person who never wanted to go overseas. I just wanted to write a check at my church to help send others. I enjoyed volunteering more than the routine equipment maintenance. When the opportunity came, I jumped at the

chance,” he said.

Samaritan’s Purse helps meet the needs of people who are victims of war, poverty, natural disasters, disease, and famine. They have projects in more than 100 countries, and organize teams of volunteers on an as-needed basis. When there is a clear medical need and equipment is needed Moore gets involved.

“We recently completed a project in Baghdad where we found a hospital desperately in need of equipment. For more than 20 years the government had been keeping the hospital from buying the needed supplies by steal-

ing their money. We set up a portable x-ray, an ultra-sound, and four operating rooms. We also donated 16 tons of medical supplies, so they could at least begin to provide care,” Moore said.

The need for biomedics to volunteer their time is great, he said. Samaritan’s Purse receives requests constantly from missionary doctors and medical teams. However, the difficult part is often getting connected to a foreign hospital that will extend an invitation. Moore suggests getting involved with a ministry or civic organization to make that connection.

He also encouraged biomedics who aren’t interested in repairing equipment abroad to volunteer their time teaching. Biomedics who are also hesitant about heading overseas can volunteer their time in the comfort of their own home.

“Just volunteering in the States to repair equipment would be wonderful,” Moore said. “I know I have



Assist International’s medical team recently flew into Mwanza, Tanzania to work with the Bugando Hospital. The Bugando Hospital is recognized by the Ministry of Health as the referral, teaching hospital in the “lake zone” of Tanzania servicing 12 million people.

a warehouse full of stuff that needs to be fixed. If a guy has a workshop in his basement and can fix equipment before it goes overseas that’s a great place to start.”

If you’re interested in venturing overseas on a volunteer medical project, both Carrott and Moore advise that there are many challenges including instability of the country, the environment, differences in voltage, and even the materials with which you work. Despite all of that, Moore said the rewards outweigh anything you can imagine.

“Volunteerism is something we kind of miss out on in our field, but seeing the need and appreciation

from this work is like nothing else,” he said. “We’re literally saving lives by just getting equipment working. If equipment fails in the U.S. we have a spare. We don’t have those luxuries in the field overseas.”

“Recently, a friend who spent 30 years doing medical missions work told me that what we’re doing is the most needed medical work in the world. There are many physicians and other medical staff volunteering but very few of us.”

“If you want to volunteer, you need to really feel a calling to give your time. It’s not something you do just because you think it’s neat,” Moore said. ■

Volunteer Your Talents

If you would like more information on how you can help these organizations visit: www.assistinternational.org or www.samaritanpurse.org.

For more volunteer opportunities and other job information visit AAMI’s new Career Center at www.aami.org/career.