

PRESS RELEASE

Thursday 6 September 2018

Heart team pledge to raise £30,000 for Medical Mission to Ghana

TWELVE volunteers from cardiac surgery teams on Teesside are set to fly out to Ghana to perform a series of life-saving heart operations.

Surgeons, cardiologists, intensive care practitioners, anaesthetists and a heart bypass technician are among those who have pledged to spend a week at the Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital (KATH) in Kumasi, Ghana's second city, in February 2019.

Their mission has received overwhelming support from colleagues at South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust – even those who are not going on the trip are gearing up to help raise £30,000 to fund equipment and medical supplies.

Enoch Akowuah, clinical director and cardiothoracic surgeon at South Tees, was born in Ghana and has been instrumental in launching the initiative alongside fellow cardiothoracic surgeon Joel Dunning.

He said: "The hospital has just appointed a cardiac surgeon but they have no kit and there are lots of patients who need operations.

"We hope to complete at least five open heart procedures and implant 10 pacemakers while we are out there."

Mr Dunning said: "Ghana has only one functioning cardiothoracic centre in Accra in the far south of the country. In central and northern Ghana, where we are heading, there is no access to cardiac surgery for the 15 million people who live there.

"Acute rheumatic fever is very high in Ghana and there are a lot of young adults - average age 29 - with heart valve problems who cannot afford treatment.

"We hope to fund all the equipment we need including artificial heart valves and cardiopulmonary bypass circuits so that those patients who are most in need can be treated for free."

Ghanaian intensive care staff will also receive training from James Cook's critical care practitioners on how to provide post-operative care.

Mr Akowuah added: "Being able to offer this opportunity to young adults who would otherwise not have access to life-saving heart surgery is a real privilege for all of us.

"I've been blown away by the enthusiasm of the whole unit to help pull this mission together. Everyone wants to help or be involved in some way, not only those who are actually going on the trip, but by raising funds and providing support for the team. It's just another reminder of what a privilege it is to work with such a great team of people."

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And he says he hopes the trip could be the start of a long-term partnership: “If we could complete a mission a year for a few years, and support the hospital to establish an ongoing programme of heart surgery, that would be really incredible.”

The big fundraising drive includes an evening of entertainment at The Masonic Hall in Stockton on Saturday 17 November with live music from local band the VanBoy Squares and a disco, silent auction and pie and pea supper. Tickets are £15 from nichola.brown1@nhs.net or alison.clark1963@outlook.com.

For those who prefer the great outdoors, a sponsored walk from Lealholm to Whitby is taking place on Saturday 29 September. To sign up for the 15-mile trek contact caroline.baldwin@nhs.net.

Heading out to the West African country from South Tees are Mr Akowuah, Mr Dunning, Dr Andrew Turley (cardiologist), Dr Mike Foley (cardiac anaesthetist), Dr Jan Spegar (consultant anaesthetist), Kim Thompson (senior perfusionist), Fiona Laughland (specialist critical care practitioner), Alison Clark (specialist critical care practitioner), Caroline Baldwin (theatre scrub nurse), Puwalani Vidanapathirana (senior operating department practitioner) and Peter Hill (operating department assistant). They will also be joined by Dr Nicholas Child (cardiologist) from North Tees.

Donations can be made directly to South Cleveland Heart Fund (clearly marked for Ghana mission) or go to [justgiving.com/crowdfunding/medicalmissiontoghana](https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/medicalmissiontoghana)

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