

# Operation Hernia.nl 2016

**Keta & Sunyani, Ghana, January 9-17, 2016**

***A heart-warming adventure focussing on treatment and education***

It is a great honour to inform you that the Dutch team of "Operation Hernia" recently finished a successful 7th mission in Ghana. "Dutch Operation Hernia" started in 2009 with 3 dedicated surgeons and has expanded profoundly over the course of years. This year a team of 15 physicians went to Ghana to use their surgical skills to treat children and adults with inguinal hernias.



The prevalence of inguinal hernias in Ghana is high (7.7% among male citizens) and nearly 25% of patients have to cease professional activities due to their symptoms. Despite these numbers elective hernia surgery is rare in this country. Elective surgical programs are unusual in Ghana as many regular government hospitals are understaffed (with an average of 9 physicians per 100.000 citizens). Consequently, 80% of patients with a symptomatic inguinal hernia remain untreated. Besides a fundamental effect on daily activities these untreated hernias bear a substantial health risk with mortality rates of up to 80% in case of incarceration.

Therefore, the key missions of 'Operation Hernia' are treating as many patients as possible and, at least as important, teaching

local physicians to perform hernia surgery independently. After having treated 143 patients and having trained 9 local doctors we look back on a successful week in both respects. We are delighted to provide you with some of our impressions.

As soon as we arrived in Ghana, all 15 doctors were divided into two groups; on Sunday the 10th of January one group took a short flight to Sunyani whereas the other group took a car to Keta hospital.

## **Keta mission (8 physicians, supervised by Dr. Boerma and Dr. Garsen)**

As soon as we got out of the car we smelled the African odour of little bonfires and heard warm African music played at the small road shops. The weather was beautiful with a warm sun and blue sky. We instantly enjoyed the great beach vibe in town. The beautiful hostel we stayed in, situated along Ghana's southern coastline, was even more beautiful and relaxing.



The next morning, the hospital bus picked us up from up from our hostel to bring us to Keta Hospital. Keta hospital is a lovely, small and clean provincial hospital with 300 beds and 5 medical officers. After a short walk through the little hospital gardens on our way to theatre, we were welcomed by the friendly theatre staff. After a short introduction we started with the operations.

A total of 70 hernias were operated by the Keta group. Inguinal hernias (severity grade

H1 to H4) were treated with a Lichtenstein procedure, using meshes which were brought from the Netherlands. Although the main focus was inguinal hernias, other hernias such as umbilical en incisional hernias were also operated by the team. Local, spinal en Ketamine anaesthesia were used.



The hospital staff and the Dutch Operation Hernia team worked well together. Local doctors were joining the operations to learn and practice Lichtenstein procedures. We were very pleased to hear that one of the medical officers even performed a Lichtenstein procedure on an incarcerated hernia on its own, one week after we left!



In the evening we spent time enjoying real Ghana life. We swam in the sea, listened to music, danced with local people and enjoyed the local food. We had a nice interaction with colleagues from the hospital who we invited for diner on the last night. The hospital administrator gave a beautiful speech and thanked us for all the effort. On Friday afternoon we finished the last surgical procedures and went back to Accra.

But not before a thousand pictures were taken and all telephone numbers were exchanged.

### **Sunyani mission (7 physicians, supervised by Dr. Simons)**

After an impressive flight through inner Ghana we arrived in Sunyani, the capital town of the Brong-Ahafo Region with over 250,000 citizens. We were welcomed by professor Tabiri, a well respected surgeon born and bred in Sunyani and one of his residents, Eric Owusu.



We took up residence in a nice lodge after which we were introduced to the team and, more important to our patients in Sunyani Regional Hospital. We were impressed by a warm welcome and by the great facilities including well maintained surgical theatres in this large teaching hospital.

The next morning, after an inspiring speech by the hospital's medical director, we started with a fruitful team briefing in which the plans for the upcoming week were discussed.

As soon as everybody was aware of these plans surgery could start. Teams of Dutch surgeons, Ghanaian medical officers and Ghanaian scrub nurses made a great effort to treat all 75 patients who had responded to *'the call for treatment'*.

Similar to the Keta mission, the most frequently performed procedure was mesh-based inguinal hernia repair using local

anaesthetics. For exceptional cases of irreducible and recurrent hernias spinal anaesthesia was available. Children with inguinal hernias were treated under general anaesthesia with Ketamine.



By using instruction videos, lectures, but of course most importantly by hands-on-training local medical officers became familiar with the common surgical procedures. Many of them will work independently in small medical posts throughout the country and we have high hopes that hernia surgery will be part of their 'arsenal'.



Professor Tabiri proved to be an outstanding host next to an experienced surgeon. He showed us around in his hometown, enabling us to fully inhale the Ghanaian culture. What struck us was the inexhaustible optimism and hospitality that was present everywhere we went. During a memorable final evening local gifts from both Sunyani and Amsterdam were exchanged and inspiring words were spoken.

Within one week a solid team had been formed and we all regretted that it already was time to say goodbye.



On Friday evening we reunited with the Keta group in Accra. We stayed at a nice lodge close to the beach and shared all experiences of the past week. After some leisure time we had to go back to the airport to catch our flight to Amsterdam. Time had gone by so quickly!

We are very grateful for a fantastic experience and we would like to thank all the sponsors below who have made this journey possible. We are looking forward to expand our mission with the "Dutch Operation Hernia" team next year!

Maarten Simons	Djemila Boerma	Frank Garssen
Suzanne Gisbertz	Nanette van Geloven	Eddy Hendriks
Jonathan Vas Nunes	Anne Ottenhof	Bert van Ramshorst
Wouter Derksen	Frank Ijpma	Theo Wiggers
Ellen Reuling	Charlotte Loozen	Maarten Anderegg

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University Medical Center Groningen, Groningen