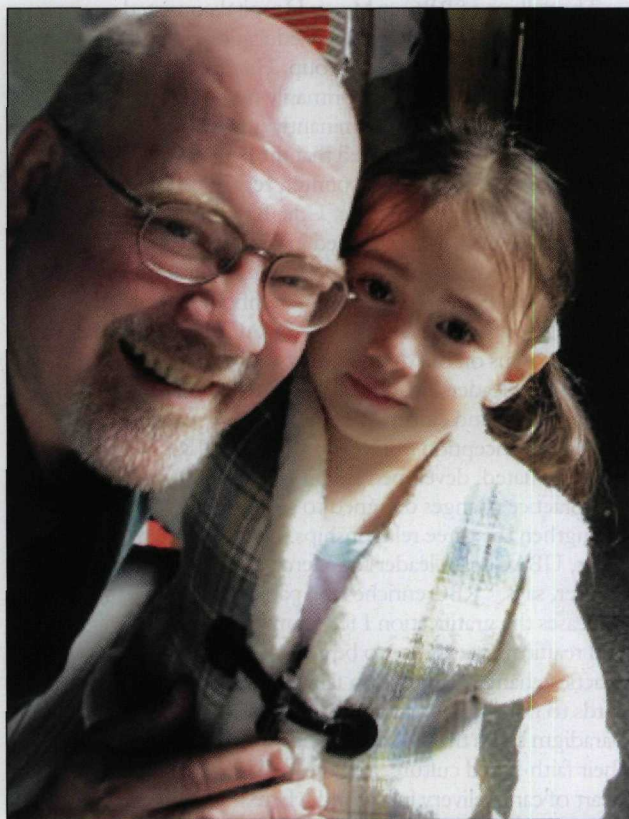


# Hospital's Mission Outreach Program Assists Thousands of People Every Year

**BY JENNIFER L. CARROLL**

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**W**hat started with two nurses saving some discarded but usable medical supplies for their overseas mission trips has grown into something far bigger, that touches thousands of lives every year in Central America, the Dominican Republic, Asia and the Ukraine.



**Dr. Kirby Sweitzer of Mercy Medical Center in Canton, Ohio, assists a young patient during a recent visit to Honduras.**

More than a decade ago, Joan Buck, RN, surgical staff nurse, and Judy Melnyk, RN, surgery/operating room instructor — both long-time employees at Mercy Medical Center in Canton, Ohio — started collecting clean but “contaminated” surgical materials for annual medical mission trips they and other Mercy employees took.

Buck recognized that keeping supplies out of a medical wastebasket was good stewardship. “This stuff, like unused dressings and surgical instruments, would simply have been thrown away,” she said. “Judy and I knew these items could be used to save lives elsewhere.”

## A NOMADIC BEGINNING

During their early efforts, Buck and Melnyk moved their storage boxes from place to place throughout the hospital. As others learned about their endeavors, more leftovers trickled in, leaving them both feeling territorial about their stockpiles.

“Even though our hearts were in the same place, we initially kept everything separate,” Melnyk said. “We had our own separate piles, and we made our own separate trip arrangements, duplicating efforts in many cases. But as time went on, we realized that was not the way God wanted us to handle this.”

## CHANGE AT 40,000 FEET

Seven years ago, Buck and Melnyk’s direction changed dramatically on a flight home from a mission trip to the Dominican Republic. During a brainstorming session with fellow “missionaries,” Dr. David Gormsen, vice president and chief medical officer at Mercy, suggested creating an umbrella organization that would coordinate resources for Mercy physicians and employees — as well as local community members — involved in short-term medical missions.

Gormsen championed the idea with hospital administration and medical staff in February 2001, and just seven months later, Mercy





**In India, more than 700 people registered to visit Mercy-affiliated physicians. The clinic offered gynecology and wellness exams, and consultations on conception and infertility.**

International Mission Outreach (MIMO) was established. The speed of the department's formation, Gormsen said, can be attributed to the harmony between MIMO and Mercy's mission.

"The Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine founded Mercy in 1908. And for a century, we have remained committed to their mission of continuing Christ's healing ministry by providing quality, compassionate, accessible and affordable care for the whole person," Gormsen said. "Every year, we provide millions of dollars of charity care to those in our community who cannot afford to pay for health care. Extending our mission to include the underserved in developing nations through MIMO was a perfect fit. This program has helped us better utilize resources as well as give thousands of hours of service in health clinics and ORs around the world."

Administered by a seven-member committee chaired by Sr. Carolyn Capuano, HM, vice president of mission and ministry services, one part-time coordinator (Buck) and many volunteers, MIMO has supported nearly 100 medical mission trips since its inception. In addition to medical supplies, the program has been a conduit for hospital and community donations of operating room and

emergency department equipment, monitors, ultrasounds, stethoscopes, air conditioners, generators, water pumps and even an ambulance.

"It was a feat to obtain the donated EMT vehicle from a local ambulance company, fill it with supplies from Mercy and ship it to the Dominican Republic," Capuano said. "It took two years to complete all the customs paperwork and shipping arrangements. The Canton Rotary covered the shipping costs. But it's there now and being used to assist people in need. This was a stellar example of community collaboration."

Although MIMO supports a variety of qualified medical mission endeavors, the program collaborates most often with three other Ohio-based organizations, including Midwest Medical Mission in Toledo, Central American Medical Outreach (CAMO) in Orrville, and Global Network Medical Missions, a ministry of High Mill Church of the Resurrection in Canton.

#### **RAISING AWARENESS**

MIMO utilizes word-of-mouth and hospital publications to raise awareness about its work. In addition to saving usable medical supplies and equipment, individuals are encouraged to make "be



well” bags, which are plastic sandwich bags filled with unused toiletries, pens, pencils, gum, balloons or small toys.

Buck remembers finding an operating table in a hospital dumpster several years ago. “After climbing into the dumpster, I discovered the table was still in usable condition,” she said. “So, I contacted Mercy’s materials management team and rescued it. Now most hospital employees think of MIMO before getting rid of functional equipment.”

In fact, teamwork between many Mercy departments and individuals has greatly contributed to the growth and success of the organization. “People from all over the hospital are always so willing to pitch in when MIMO needs help,” Buck said.

Community networking has also led to participation and donations from charitable organizations like the Canton Rotary Club, as well as other hospitals, physicians and church groups. MIMO also received special publicity when an area journalist joined the 2007 mission trip to the Dominican Republic and wrote an article about her positive experience.

Buck said she seldom worries about running out of supplies. “Like Jesus with the loaves and fish, it seems like the faster we hand it out, the faster our storage area fills up,” she said.

## MAKING AN IMPACT

In partnership with Midwest Medical Mission, MIMO has developed a close relationship with



Dr. Chitra (center) speaks with a patient through an interpreter (right). Mercy OR nurse Cheryl Ramsey (left) assists.



Antonio Musa Hospital in San Pedro, Dominican Republic. In February 1992, Mars Bautista, MD, a plastic surgeon at Mercy for more than 30 years, organized and led a medical team from Canton to the Caribbean island nation.

Today, MIMO continues to support Midwest Medical efforts in the Dominican Republic annually. Surgeons, internists, anesthesiologists, anesthesiologists, surgical assistants, registered nurses and others ñ including several individuals who speak Spanish ñ travel to Antonio Musa to provide health screenings and perform deformity repairs, including cleft lip and palate closures and skin grafts. Twelve-hour workdays, at least 500 exams and more than 100 surgeries are normal.

Gormsen noted this continuity has made a tremendous impact in San Pedro. He said, "Over the past 16 years, we have watched this team effort progress in many ways. When we arrive, we know exactly what to expect and can start our work immediately. Because our efficiency has increased, we can provide better triage, make better use of time and care for as many patients as possible. And, we often take time to mentor physicians and medical students during our stay."

As part of this growing partnership, MIMO welcomed two Antonio Musa anesthesiologists to Mercy last year, where they were mentored by anesthesiology and respiratory teams for two weeks. In addition to their training, the visiting physicians spent time in radiology and the emergency department.

## BEYOND TIME AND MONEY

Last year in Santa Rosa De Copan, Honduras, MIMO supported CAMO in launching a local hospital's new emergency department. Mercy and Honduran physicians and nurses worked together to develop trauma protocols and perform mock triage prior to opening one of the best equipped EDs in the country. Visiting surgeons also completed many cleft lip and palate repairs, skin grafts, other reconstructive surgery and bladder repairs and suspensions.

As with all the medical mission trips, staff members who choose to join must cover their own expenses and use their vacation. However, MIMO attempts to help offset costs by sponsoring charity golf outings, raffles and other fundraisers.

Katie Simmons, RN, a surgical nurse who coordinates Mercy's blood conservation program, traveled to Honduras with the team and found the experience extremely rewarding. "I feel so blessed to have a profession that I love and can share with others," she said. "I get so much more from the trips than I could ever put into them with time and



**Karen McLaughlin, a Mercy ultrasound technician, scans a patient during a routine exam.**

money. Helping a baby live a normal life, a smile from Dad, tears from Mom — priceless."

## A PERMANENT MARK

Melnyk, who has coordinated several trips to the Ukraine, went with a team to Madras, India, for the first time in 2007. Collaborating with High Mill's Global Network, the group focused on women's health, setting up a free, three-day OB/GYN clinic in a local orphanage. Of the more than 700 female patients registered at the clinic, very few had been previously examined or treated. Team members also provided education about breast self-examinations, nutrition and infertility.

Throughout the trip, the team concentrated on care for the whole person, offering not only physical treatment but also spiritual comfort. "We became acutely aware of the spiritual aspect of our work and had many opportunities to pray with our patients," she said. "I am consistently humbled by these mission experiences. Each is a remarkable blessing, and I am amazed at how they continue to impact me."

Gormsen echoed Melnyk's wonder at the mark MIMO-affiliated mission trips leave on the individuals who go. He said, "Those who come to us for treatment totally trust us. Many of them entrust their most precious possessions — their children — to us. There is no other profession on Earth like the medical profession." ■



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