

Dok Elma's E-musing
January 2011

New year, new beginning! A lot of people, especially us Asians, believe that decisions and actions set the direction for the rest of the year. I like January because it's my period of assessment and planning. No, you did not hear from me last month because I wasn't able to compose my prayer bulletin. I was home for 2.5 weeks and returned to Liberia Dec 16, with my mother! Yes, she is here. She enjoyed the long travel though confessed feeling as though we won't ever get to Ganta. What with 27 Hours of flying through 5 countries then 5 Hours on rough roads. She always thanks God and me for the opportunity of being with people she prays for using the UMW Prayer Calendar. She keeps busy looking for small work she can help at the mission, like scrub-cleaning all signboards. She has begun her ministry with the people she encounters by praying with and laying hands on them. But her main task is keeping me clean and fed. As for me, it is good to have my mother here. I have somebody to talk with at the close of day. It has been extra difficult since returning.

There are just 2 of us MDs managing this 150 bed capacity hospital because the 3rd doctor went AWOL. Later we came to know he has been employed in a big hospital in Monrovia. These last 2 weeks were particularly trying. Each of us does a straight week of night calls aside from our usual Monday-to-Saturday work schedule. It's common to be called to do at least 2 Caesarean Sections in the middle of the night. After successive nights of C Sections, I was called for a tiny 18 year old premature birth who had been in labor for 3 days. It took them 3 days to finally decide to get her to a hospital. But her uterus was so fatigued that it just won't contract despite a maximum dose of available medicines. The choice was between bleeding to death or living without the uterus. The choice was easy, but to live with the consequence of that choice is a different matter. Thankfully her baby was born strong and she has at least a child. This patient was followed by a 19 year old whose baby died in the womb, because they delayed coming to the hospital. I thought I would be doing another hysterectomy. In my moment of despair I cried out, "I hate the uterus! I don't want to see another one!" God is good. I didn't see any others for 3 days. But this week I had daily hysterectomies for older women with tumor growth in their uteri. My Pediatric Surgeon-Boss was offended when I told him I was doing hysterectomies here. Maybe he believes we Pediatric surgeons are trained for a higher calling. My mother, on the other hand, told me how wonderful that God has called me and put me in a place where people are in dire need of surgeons. Mothers are God's special blessing!

At the close of 2010, we here were praying for the country of Guinea because of danger of post election violence developing into civil war. Ganta hospital is just 15 minutes from the Guinea border and war or not we get Guinean patients. Praise God the situation was resolved and peace restored. Now it's another neighbor on the verge of civil war. Ivory Coast is 2.5 hours away and the Liberia border towns have had refugees crossing over since the start of 2011. Of last report there are 5000 Ivorian refugees registered. I was a member of the reconnaissance group from Ganta that went to the border to assess the health facility from the border to us. This is in preparation for an escalation. There were at least 4 small health clinics manned by nurses along the main road and Ganta hospital is the only and nearest hospital with the capability of receiving spill-over casualties. We have put together an emergency plan. Although the media reports have not been encouraging, we continue to pray for peaceful resolution. Understandably, Liberians are wary of rumors of wars because their own country has been ravaged by several civil wars. As if our present workload isn't heavy, we prepare to receive more.

Monday, Jan 17, I had a long OR list (11 cases operated) by the afternoon I was already planning on how I can manage Tuesday. There was to be 5 scheduled cases and it was my out-patient clinic day. I was the only doctor in the hospital for 4 days. By Tuesday morning I have developed some kind of plan. But God had a better plan. In His perfect time, He sent a group from Ohio. Late Monday night UM Pastor Cathy Dekreide, husband Daniel and 2 medical students arrived. They minister in another mission point in southeastern Liberia. Daniel is a Medical doctor who worked here 2 years ago. And seeing the need, he immediately filled in and took the out-patient clinic duty! I was able to do 9 operations that day. One of the medical students was tailing me and was exposed to a lot of medical mission stuff. Pray with me that she will keep a heart for mission burning in her. But isn't God great? The "11:59" God- His help is never late.

January is definitely eventful. If beginnings do set the tempo for how the year is going to be, it sure is gonna be challenging. But even surer is God's very present help in every situation. Please pray for strength and stamina for me. Patience too, because it seems to be in short supply after several busy nights. Pray for peace in West Africa region, specifically Ivory Coast. Pray also for the Liberia Annual Conference happening in Ganta on Feb 7-13. Thank you for blessing me with your love, prayers and graces.

Till next time,

Elma

Sent from Dok Elma's iPod
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