

Backus surgeon travels to Africa to help patients

Traveling to Africa to perform much needed spinal surgeries in less than optimal conditions gives Kenneth Paonessa, MD, an orthopedic surgeon on the Backus Medical Staff, a fresh perspective on the healthcare delivered here at home.

One time the facility in Ghana lost power seven times over the course of a two-hour surgery. But in the end, a patient was able to receive a life-changing surgery that would have been previously unavailable.

"The people are so appreciative, you really do leave and feel like you've accomplished a lot," Dr. Paonessa said.

Dr. Paonessa is among a group of clinicians who travel to Africa regularly to perform complicated spinal surgeries and joint replacement for the many patients in Ghana and Barbados who need them. During a typical trip, the team of physicians, nurses and physical therapists participate in 35-45 operations, some of them life-saving procedures.

To bring attention to the need for these surgeries in other parts of the world, and to recruit others to make the trip or contribute to a movement to build an orthopedic specialty hospital in Ghana, a special event is planned in Norwich on Saturday, June 23, at 1 p.m.

Dr. Oheneba Boachie-Adjei, professor of Orthopedic Surgery and Chief of the Scoliosis Service at the Hospital of Special Surgery in New York City and founder of the Foundation for Orthopedics and Complex Spine, Inc., along with his Foundation team that was recently featured in the Discovery Channel's documentary called "Surgery Saved My Life," will be on hand at the Parish Life Center of the Sacred Heart School, at the corner of 15 Hunters Ave. and South B Street in Taftville.

Dr. Broachie will narrate a short video presentation on the Foundation and highlights of the Discovery Channel special. Admission is free and light refreshments will be served. Contact Hercy Lord at 434-4328 or hlord@snet.net. To learn about their missions to Africa, visit their website at www.orthofocus.org

Dr. Paonessa said he is attempting to recruit a team of local caregivers to take another trip to Africa, possibly in November.



Kenneth Paonessa, MD, right, participates in a spinal surgery during one of his trips to Africa.