



# 2024 Malawi, Africa

## TRIP REPORT - PART 2

### OUR STORY

#### Access Health Africa (AHA) Lilongwe, Malawi, Africa September 22-28, 2024

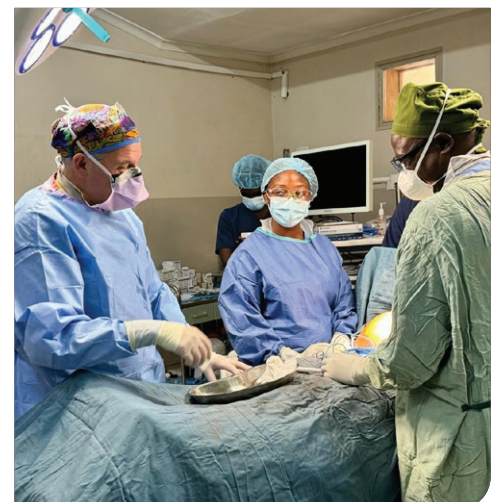
Operation Medical has held a long-standing commitment to working closely with local in-country professionals while engaged in our missions. Sharing education and knowledge is always a priority for our teams when possible because of its long-term benefits for the local providers and their patients long after our mission weeks conclude. In addition to the cases performed and highlighted in Part I of our Trip Report, there was a large amount of time and energy poured into these educational endeavors throughout the week.

Our general surgery teams, led by Dr. Paul Kunkel, Dr. Yi Wilson Wang, and Dr. Marc Northern, took the time to not only complete 45 cases, but also share some new techniques

with the local team. To share one example, their staff were not accustomed to utilizing mesh for hernia repairs. Our surgeons were able to demonstrate how to insert the mesh and explain how it can greatly reduce the risk of recurrence, especially in cases with larger, more complicated hernias. Not only did the surgical residents take part in the procedures to learn the process, but some junior residents also took the opportunity to scrub in and observe as well. In order to facilitate their continued ability to perform this procedure using the mesh, we were able to leave a generous amount of mesh behind as a donation.

Dr. Jeff Segil and his surgical team completed a total of 14 procedures in the OB/GYN department, while also providing extensive education and training to Dr. Taurai Kithinji and her local team. She was most excited about learning the uterosacral ligament suspension procedure, which she had never

heard of previously. She also learned how to perform a colpopoiesis procedure. Both of these will be beneficial for her to perform surgery for pelvic organ prolapse, which is common in her patient population. She also had the opportunity to work alongside Dr. Segil on several vaginal hysterectomies in order to become comfortable with this procedure. As opposed to abdominal hysterectomies, this procedure comes with less risk and quicker recovery times, which is important for the patients in this region who usually need to return to work as quickly as possible. Dr. Kithinji expressed her sincere gratitude for the opportunity to learn these techniques, as well as for the large donation of supplies that our team left behind for her to use on future patients. She is also looking forward to passing these skills along to the rest of her team, mentoring upcoming surgical







### OUR STORY:

residents and fellow surgeons in these procedures to further enhance their skillsets. The education did not stop in the operating theaters. Once the patients had been moved into the PACU, our highly skilled nurses took over sharing information and education with the nursing staff to help improve patient outcomes following their surgical procedures. Some topics of focus included sharing information on what to look for on

resolution of spinal anesthesia. Erin St. Gelais, RN who was working in our OB/GYN PACU, had thought ahead to print out and laminate some helpful dermatome charts, which the local team found very useful. Dr. Ian asked for additional copies so that he could share with his anesthesia staff and placed a copy on all of the anesthesia machines through-out the ORs.



monitors, medications that may be helpful to post-op patients as well as alternative interventions if they do not have those medications accessible. A large focus of education was on dermatomes and how to assess the

It should also be mentioned that their teams also impacted our volunteers through sharing their practices and knowledge as well. Both groups shared a mutual respect and took advantage of the opportunities presented to learn from each other. It is our sincere hope that the education and training provided to KCH's highly capable teams will benefit them now and in the future as they pass this knowledge along to their colleagues.

### PATIENT STORY - SWADIK AKULEKA ILEOSTOMY REVERSAL DR. YI WILSON WANG & HIS SURGICAL TEAM

Swadik Akuleka makes a living as a butcher in the village of Kaondo, just outside of the capital city, Lilongwe. He farms chickens and goats, using the profits from his livestock to sustain a life for himself, his wife, Edena Malinga, and their four children, ages 5 through 25.

Their lives were changed dramatically last year, when Swadik was the victim of a stabbing. To cover the costs of the care needed and transportation to the medical facilities, the family had to sell off some of their animals. Not able to work to provide for his family for several weeks, they struggled to obtain enough food to eat without his income.

His injuries were severe and required immediate treatment. After seeking treatment at a local hospital, he was transferred to KCH due to the extent of his injuries. Part of the treatment provided included a temporary loop ileostomy. While essential for his initial care, this is a procedure that does need to be reversed after a certain amount of time has passed in order to improve quality of life for the patient.

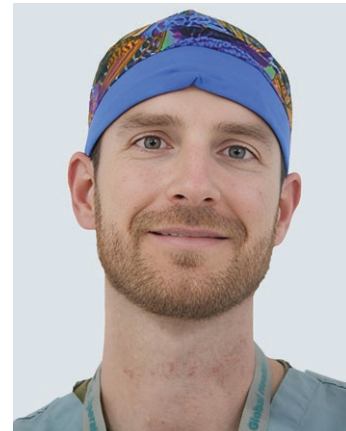
After hearing about the mission camp, Swadik returned to KCH in hopes of having his ileostomy reversal completed. By his side, was his wife, Edena. Having been together since they were in primary school, they share a special bond, and they were both so grateful for the work that our team was doing and together, expressed their gratitude for the care provided by Dr. Yi Wilson Wang and his surgical team. Now that he has received this surgery and is on the road to a full recovery, he expects to be able to grow his business back to where it was before the incident, providing fully for his family.



## VOLUNTEER REFLECTIONS:

**D. Marc Northern, M.D.**  
*General Surgeon*  
*US Air Force Academy Clinic*

I'm so excited to have completed our recent trip to Malawi! Dr Mukul Parikh and Dr Jeff Segil led our 20 person team to Kamuzu Central Hospital. I've been on several trips with Operation Medical in the past, to both India and Haiti over the years, and I always enjoy meeting up with colleagues from these prior trips. Working with old friends and meeting new ones makes each trip so very memorable. Each trip is always so unique and special, with incredibly committed, hardworking teammates. It is always so refreshing to be a part of a group of people so eager to work hard and help people, sometimes in unusual or unexpected circumstances. The team in Malawi was exceptionally flexible and willing to adjust in order to maximize all the care we were able to provide. For example, I was most impressed when a neurosurgery patient, recovering in the postop area, demonstrated respiratory distress and our team's quick thinking and skills saved his life. Our team hadn't been involved in this patient's care to that point, but our recovery nurse, Emily Knight, immediately identified his trouble, called for help, and got the situation under control. Lindsay Devers and Ben Segil both immediately joined in and helped establish an airway and a way to safely get him the critical care he needed. The whole team dropped everything and rapidly intervened to save a life, so impressive!



On all my prior trips with Operation Medical, we have had the opportunity to offer life changing surgery to patients who have been unable to get the care they needed. This trip was no different. We had the opportunity to really offer life changing surgery with our many ostomy reversals, hernia repairs, and GYN surgeries. I was proud that our team was able to offer so many ostomy reversals in a place where most patients with ostomies don't even have ostomy supplies. These patients often resorted to plastic bags and string to manage their ostomy output.

While in the military, I've deployed multiple times to austere environments. The challenges faced while deployed parallel many of the challenges with providing care in a place like Malawi. I know that my time in the military helps me adjust to a system like the one in Malawi, but I also know, that my time spent in Malawi will also inform my future deployments overseas. I'm so very thankful for the opportunity to join such a high quality group of individuals.

I very much look forward to future trips with such gifted doctors, nurses, techs in the future. Many thanks to Lindsay Hoke, Stacey Segil, Midge Marchaterre for their tireless support the whole week! To all our providers, nurses, techs, thank you. I very much look forward to future trips with old friends and new!

**Christine Otto RN, BSN, CNOR, RNFA**  
*Trusted Health RNFA Travel Nurse*  
*UPMC Carlisle Hospital RNFA*

Participating in a mission trip has been a long-time dream for me. Over the years many friends and co-workers have told me of their experiences with missions. I currently am a travel Registered Nurse First Assist. My career has taken me many places; one of which is Women and Babies Hospital / Penn Medicine Lancaster Surgery Center where I met Doctor Ken Arthur. Dr. Arthur mentioned the Operation Medical organization and ventures he has participated in. I became more interested as the conversation progressed, which moved to me joining the team for the India mission in January 2023. I was elated to join the team. Karmae Almbaugh, Kim Snyder, and Scott Slocum (just to name a few) are some of the medical professionals/ friends that encouraged me to pursue joining the team. The India mission trip was rewarding in so many ways and was beyond exceptional. The people of India were so gracious and thankful for the mission team's care and services provided to those who may not have been able to afford medical care or even have access to health care. At this point, "I am hooked!"



The Africa mission trip is my second venture with Operation Medical and it too was as rewarding and exceptional as the India mission! I was paired with the Gynecology team to help facilitate women's health procedures, and to teach and encourage the local staff who we worked along side of. The team performed many procedures, but one really stands out for me. A young mother arrived at the facility, post-delivery of twins, in very poor health. At presentation she looked as if she were still nine months pregnant; turns out she had a serious infection involving her incision site which was affecting her entire abdomen and needed emergency care. The team quickly got her into the operating room and performed a lifesaving procedure. I was the first assistant for this procedure and was able to close her incisions without complications. Two days post-op the Nurse Practitioner on the women's health team, Katie, followed up with the patient and showed me pictures of the patient alert, smiling and nursing her twins! The feelings inside me are indescribable, it is nothing short of a miracle this young mother is not only alive but alert and vibrant and able to care for her children! I do not often have the luxury of seeing the patient's post-surgery, so I am grateful for the update from Katie.

Medical care is something I feel we as Americans take for granted. The volunteer services provided through Operation Medical's Team is reaching some of the world's poorest people and providing them invaluable services that would otherwise be out of reach for them. Even though there were many events throughout the week in the other specialties, this single event touched my heart deeply. This team is fantastic, and I would be honored to work alongside every one of them again! Thank you to the entire team (front line and behind the scenes people) for all that you do! I am looking forward to our next mission!



## VOLUNTEER REFLECTIONS:

### Paul Kunkel, M.D.

*General Surgeon*

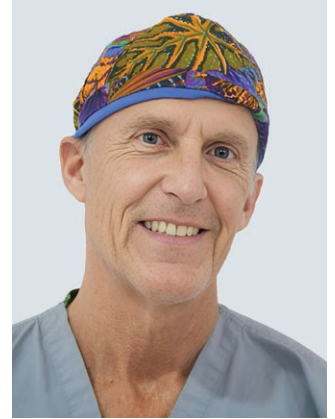
*UPMC Grandview Surgical Associates*

What a fun week we had in Malawi! I had the pleasure of being able to bring my wife Rosie, an anesthetist, and my daughter, Sammy, a fourth-year medical student on an amazing trip to Lilongwe for a week of surgery and patient care in the very busy hospital of KCH.

The Operation Medical group was fantastic - dedicated, talented, competent - an absolute joy to work with. The patients, too, were gracious, simple and so grateful of our hard-working team. We worked alongside the local OR staff to help many patients who came from long distances to receive free care from our enthusiastic group.

Lilongwe is a vibrant city filled with all types of sights, sounds and smells. Every trip to and from the hospital was a visual feast of activity with road construction, people everywhere walking and on bikes, vibrant colors, people selling their roadside wares.

I can't say enough about the Operation Medical team and the Access Health Africa team which set us up for success with a lot of preparation before we arrived as well as troubleshooting each day to make our days as productive as possible. It was a week of rejuvenation and belief in the idea that kindness is truly the best answer. I can't wait for my next mission!



### Margaret Marchaterre

*Researcher/Photographer*

*Cornell University*

My passion for being the Operation Medical (Op Med) photographer for the mission to Kamuzu Central Hospital in Malawi and the opportunity to be the "historian" for the remarkable care given to those in need for this and prior trips throughout Africa and India is an honor and has both personal and professional roots. All of this has been deeply meaningful to me in large part because of foundational rules of life instilled in me at an early age by my mother and her three sisters. Their caring and compassion for others less fortunate than us, whether it be on a physical or spiritual level, has always served as a guiding light in my own path through life, which has led me, in part, to the joy and sense of fulfillment I have experienced being a part of the Operation Medical team.

Dr. Jeffrey Segil, a family friend and Op Med OB/GYN surgeon, first recruited me for the 2018 Rwanda Mission. I quickly learned that the Op Med team is dedicated to fulfilling these same ideals. I am forever riveted by the surgery that I now get to witness online. And yes, in my heart I want to do everything in the operating room from counting needles, handing the correct tool for each delicate procedure, lasering through tissue, and suturing shut wounds. Although I lack the formal professional training to do any of this, which I have only done with small non-human animals (fish and rodents), what I can do is photograph the team's elaborate ballet, the dance of tools, the sterile handling, the kind touches and the happy, grateful smiles.



For the past 35+ years I have been a laboratory director of a behavioral neuroscience lab at Cornell University, collaborating on a wide range of projects from recording the sounds of fish in their natural habitats to documenting the anatomical organization of brain centers that allow fish to essentially talk with one another and interpret the meaning of messages delivered by sounds that are structured much like human speech sounds. Although my daily life has been focused on academia and research, I have also sought fulfillment by helping to shepherd others through illness up until death, which in years past has included volunteering at a local Hospicare, caring for para- and quadriplegics, and learning of and witnessing the post-war trauma experiences of veterans. The Op Med missions complement all those experiences. The Malawi mission was extraordinary as were the others before it. AHA opened all the doors for us and we lived together with all our needs met. (I must admit that sleeping in bunk beds was fun!) As a result, the Op Med team had a wonderful camaraderie together and with the incredible AHA staff. And last but not least, the patients and people we met from the community opened their hearts to us. I see why Malawi is called the "Warm Heart of Africa".

## SUPPORT STAFF

While clinical volunteers get much of the spotlight, it is important to note that our mission's success is a result of many non-clinical volunteers as well. Behind the scenes of the OR and PACU are some very diligent, busy individuals...keeping track of patient data for Op Med Records, taking photos so that we can share our supporters through trip reports and annual reports. The non-clinical staff also oversees logistical matters, keeping the inventory of supplies straight and ready for deployment to the surgical teams.

**Thank you to all of our support volunteers that play a vital role in mission success.**

**CASES BY GENDER:**

Female – 18

Male - 41

**CASES BY AGE:**

Youngest – 15 years old

Oldest – 85 years old

**CASES BY TYPE:**

Hernia Repair - 25

Ileostomy Reversal - 7

Vaginal Hysterectomy - 5

Anterior/Posterior Repair - 4

Colostomy Reversal - 3

Stoma Reversal - 3

Herniorrhaphy - 3

Abdominal Hysterectomy - 2

Ileostomy Closure - 2

Hartman's Procedure - 2

Myonectomy - 1

Abdominal Exlap - 1

Colpocleisis - 1

**Team Reflections****Team Coordinator  
Lindsay Hoke**

Having joined the Operation Medical team one year ago, this was the first mission I have had the honor of being a part of. I saw first-hand how the team greatly improved the lives of our patients, while also having a positive impact on the local people, providers, and the hospital overall through providing care, education, donations, and simple interactions. I was so impressed by this team that our Leaders put together - kind, selfless, and talented individuals who all came together for the same purpose. I'd also like to express my gratitude towards Karen and the rest of the AHA team, who were beside us every step of the way from trip planning to execution. I look forward to working with each of these volunteers again on future trips and hopefully partnering with AHA in future missions as well.

**OPERATION  
MEDICAL™****2024  
Malawi,  
Africa**

Operation Medical is thankful for all of the participants and welcomes them to join us for another camp. Please check our website at [www.operationmedical.com](http://www.operationmedical.com) to see how you can get involved in providing global healthcare.