

Tammy Higgins - Story

Tammy is a very special nurse who loves to share her many global health experiences. She has been involved in global health for 10 years and she feels honored to have had the opportunity to participate in 8 international trips thus far. She has worked in Kenya, Haiti, Uganda, and China. She feels abundantly blessed and wants to give back to those who she can help by sharing her nursing skills with Third World and emerging countries.

Below is a story she shared about one of her first experiences in global health – she began by fundraising first for an organization called “Hearts Around the World” whose mission statement was “one world, one mission.” That phrase tugged at her heartstrings, and she felt an immediate connection.

She learned that by educating the physicians and nurses on their missions and working in tandem with the local counterparts that the hospitals can and do achieve self-sufficiency. The old adage, “If you give a man a fish, you can feed him for one day. If you teach a man to fish, he can feed himself for a lifetime.”

Tammy strongly identified with these words and immediately volunteered. She began to fundraise for the organization and prepared physically and emotionally for her first trip. She did her research, received all her vaccines, packed her protein bars and bug spray, and in 2011, was off on her first mission to Nairobi, Kenya. She was thrilled and, of course, nervously excited. As each of the Hearts Around the World trips are unique, depending on the local needs assessment and the expertise of the team members, she soon discovered her role in Kenya was going to be Cardiovascular Nursing Education. Among other cardiac specialists, they had a cardiac interventionalist, cardiac anesthesiologist, and a cardiac surgeon. Her job was to teach the nurses pre- and post-cardiac catheterization care and post-op cardiac surgery care. Even if a surgery is a huge success, unless you have educated and trained nurses to care for the patient post-operatively, heart programs cannot succeed.

She was one of two nurses on this trip and the work schedules were quite taxing. The first half of the trip was more about establishing relationships and developing trust among the staff. She quickly learned that it was imperative that her approach be one of ‘partnering’. Tammy needed to roll up her sleeves and assist at the bedside. She noted that the week went by much too quickly and was saddened when it was time to say goodbye. When she got back to the States, she could not stop talking about her amazing experiences and how much she loved the people and culture of Kenya. Her husband was actually worried she was going to up and move to Africa!

Tammy is extremely passionate about the global health work and definitely caught the global health bug. She returned to Kenyatta National Hospital the following year to continue the education and training for the nurses and to build upon the friendships she had made during her first visit.