

Signed. Sealed. Delivered.

Building a Bridge Between Abundance and Need

At a clinic in the Philippines, the medical staff washes and reuses gauze, needles, syringes and catheters. In South America, a hospital is without beds, and lying on the floor may be better than lying on a mattress soaked through with fluids from previous patients. In Africa, patients undergo medical procedures without the benefit of anesthesia. This is the current reality for many of the sick and wounded in developing countries. A lack of medical supplies, including mattresses and beds, make health care nearly unattainable and downright dangerous for these patients. Fortunately, the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis in Springfield, Illinois, through their Mission Outreach program, have developed a process to provide and deliver these much needed medical supplies to hospitals and clinics in over 75 countries.



Medical professional in the Democratic Republic of the Congo tending to a young child with medical supplies from Mission Outreach.

Hospital Sisters of St. Francis

Mission Outreach grew directly out of the work of the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis in Springfield, Illinois. The Sisters are members of an International Congregation of Franciscan Sisters with their American Province based in Springfield and their Sisters serving in various locations around the world. Their service to the sick and poor is deeply rooted within their history.

The Congregation of the Hospital Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis was founded in 1844, in Telgte, Germany, by Father Christopher Bernsmeyer, OFM, when he asked several young women to help tend to the needs of the sick and poor. In 1875, at the request of Bishop Peter Baltus, Diocese of Alton, Illinois, several sisters arrived in America to provide nursing care to the people of Illinois. Over the next 139 years, the Sisters founded 12 hospitals, seven in Illinois and four in Wisconsin, wrote and published a nursing manual, assumed sponsorship of two additional hospitals and incorporated the Hospital Sisters Health System (HSHS) with a central staff of specialists located in Springfield to support their hospital network.

Today, the Hospital Sisters continue to live the spirit of St. Francis by devoting themselves to providing quality healthcare to those in need and Mission Outreach is the embodiment of that spirit.

Mission Outreach

The Hospital Sisters spent many years providing much needed healthcare in missions around the world. They saw firsthand the desperate need for medical supplies in the developing world and realized that a formal process for donating these supplies was needed. They also observed that organizations donating to the developing world, although with the best of intentions, hadn't always done the necessary planning and preparation to ensure their donations would be as effective as possible. Many times,

Surgical room in Haiti. ❶ Surgical light is from a hospital partner in Breese, Illinois. ❷ Anesthesia machine is from a hospital partner in Effingham, Illinois and ❸ the surgical table is from a hospital partner in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin.

supplies would go to waste because they weren't needed, the local electric and water sources weren't compatible with the equipment, the skill level of the staff precluded them from properly using the equipment, or any number of other reasons that weren't thought of before the medical supplies were sent to hospitals and clinics overseas.

"The Sisters wanted to professionalize the donation process," explains Georgia Winson, executive director of Mission Outreach, "and really pair professionalism with a profound respect and love for those in need." It was with these objectives in mind that Mission Outreach was created in 2002.

Since its inception, the goal at Mission Outreach has not just been to send medical supplies to hospitals and clinics around the globe, but to deliver supplies that have been requested, are truly needed and will be used to make a difference in patients' lives. As sponsor of the HSHS, the Sisters are more than aware that an excess of medical supplies and equipment exists in the United States, and that many of those excess items wind up in landfills across the country each year. The plan was to collect those excess medical supplies from healthcare providers and send them to hospitals and clinics in developing countries. The first hospital partnership was, of course, with their own HSHS; however, over the years Mission Outreach has worked to build partnerships among hospitals and clinics throughout Illinois and Wisconsin.



Partners in Recovery

Mission Outreach has partnered with over 60 hospitals and 18 clinics to collect surplus medical equipment and supplies. Many of the hospital partners place bins on each floor and instruct staff to put unused, leftover supplies into the bins. The donations are then picked up by Mission Outreach.

Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare, Glendale, Wisconsin, is one of those hospital partners and according to Senior Vice President-Mission Services, Terri Rocolo, “This is a win/win partnership that not only helps to meet the medical needs in other countries, but at the same time saves on disposal costs and keeps useable equipment and supplies out of landfills. It is an opportunity that is both cost-effective and in alignment with our values and Franciscan tradition.”

Aside from the surplus medical donations, hospital partners are asked to make a monetary donation as well. “It (monetary donation) is based on the number of licensed beds at the hospital,” explains Winson, “and in the overall hospital budget it’s actually a small donation; however, it amounts to about a third of our overall revenue every year.”

Most of the participating hospitals are nonprofit and have to document their nonprofit status by detailing what they do for the community. Mission Outreach is able to provide these hospitals with quarterly reports about their product donations that help them maintain and document that benefit to the community. As Winson puts it, “The product donations and the monetary donations from our hospital partners allow us to do what we do at very, very low cost to our mission partners.”

The Process

Once the donations have been picked up, they are delivered to the Mission Outreach warehouse where they are initially sorted by expiration date. While they don’t send expired items overseas, there are two exceptions, gloves and gauze. The need for gloves and gauze is so high, that volunteers take these items out of their original, sterile, but expired packaging, then repackage and label them as clean, non-sterile.

Next, the items are sorted into 26 categories, such as needles, syringes, sutures, instruments, etc., and then the items are sorted again by unique item, for example, gloves will be sorted by latex, non-latex, powdered, non-powdered, small, medium and large. “Our goal is for hospital staff in the developing world to have a very well-organized supply chain,” relates Winson, “they’re able to go to the shelf and take down exactly what they need to treat the patient. They shouldn’t have to sort through miscellaneous supplies to find what they need.”

Finally, the items are packaged, a quality check is performed to make sure everything is correctly labeled and they are entered into the online inventory. The items are then immediately available for recipients to order.

Mission Outreach has largely operated by word of mouth in the developing world. Most recipient organizations approach Mission Outreach in partnership with another organization, or mission partner, that will help them financially, like the Lions Club, a church organization or another hospital. Once their application is accepted, the recipient organization receives an access code for the online inventory database and they begin to build their order. Unlike many other MSROs (Medical Surplus Recovery Organizations), the recipient organization is allowed to select exactly what they need to serve their patients and the Mission Outreach staff is always on hand to help them through the process.

“We make sure we know our recipients,” explains Winson. “So we talk to them and find out about their electrical system, is it a reliable electrical source? We ask about their water source since some equipment requires a certain type of water. We ask about the weight bearing load of their floors because some of the equipment might be too heavy to be accommodated by their infrastructure. We make sure every piece of equipment that is sent can really be used effectively in the developing world.”

Items can be either hand carried or shipped in 40-foot containers. The staff at Mission Outreach work with the freight forwarder to provide logistics and shipping documentation.

Hospital Sisters Mission Outreach is a member of Christian Brothers Services Risk Pooling Trust. “I feel when we’re working with other faith-based organizations like Christian Brothers Services,” states Georgia Winson, “that we are pulling in the same direction and we are equally yoked and have the same motivation.”

The Financial Model

It is not an operation without cost. Every 40-foot container costs \$23,400 to put together, this does not include the surplus medical equipment and supplies which are always free to the recipients and their mission partners. The container costs include transportation fees for trucking and shipping, staffing costs, boxes and other miscellaneous charges. Recipients and their mission partners are asked to raise \$6,200 to go towards the container costs. "They are asked to pay a small amount of the container costs because they also have to pay the shipping costs, which can be between \$4,000 and \$6,000," according to Winson. "They will ultimately have a total cost of around \$12,000; however, they will receive contents that are valued between \$100,000 and \$140,000. If they had to pay for these items it would be an impossible operation for them. Right now they're paying only about a fourth of the cost."

Mission Outreach covers the remaining \$17,000 through their own fundraising efforts. "The monetary contributions our hospitals make, our annual fundraiser and our donor contributions, all go towards keeping the cost very low for our mission partners," states Winson.

Volunteers

Mission Outreach operates with a staff of 10 full-time equivalent staff members and a deep pool of volunteers who logged over 27,000 volunteer hours in the last year.

"We have a number of parishes and churches that volunteer as well as a number of corporations," details Winson, "we also work with local universities and high schools and we have some really good, solid volunteers and organizations. We're blessed that we have an overflow right now of volunteers."

Volunteers do not need a medical background to lend a helping hand and all receive basic orientation and training. Lead volunteers receive specialized training to help them develop a familiarity with the items and be able to direct a core group of volunteers in the sorting process. "It is an opportunity," explains Deacon Al Laabs, former hospital CEO for an HSHS hospital and current lead volunteer, "to give back to them (Hospital Sisters) for a lot of things I received from them, not just prayers and my rewarding career, but an ethic of Franciscan service that became a part of me." Laabs has been volunteering at Mission Outreach since 2006 and leads a volunteer team every Wednesday.

"The motivation really is to care for those in need," relates Winson. "The Franciscan message is a message of stewardship, a message of caring for the poor, a message of making sure that we care for the environment as well as God's gifts. There's a real sense of fellowship and a feeling of working together to do something beautiful," continues Winson. "They might think that they're so far removed from that actual end recipient; but, in fact, they really aren't. They're handling all those supplies that will eventually help somebody. They take it to heart with each gesture knowing that they're impacting someone in a positive way."



Mission Outreach volunteers sort donated medical supplies.



Medical supplies from Mission Outreach are received by staff at a medical facility in Karawa, Democratic Republic of the Congo.



Winson helps to sort medical supplies donated by Mission Outreach's hospital partners.

The Future



A small section of the 23,000 square foot Mission Outreach warehouse.



Residents of Antiqua, Guatemala, help unload a truck filled with medical supplies from Mission Outreach for the Clinica Medica Maria.



This Mobile Health Clinic, donated to Mission Outreach by St. Joseph's Hospital in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, is bound for Guatemala.



Winson and Mission Outreach volunteers inside the donated Mobile Health Clinic.

In the last 12 years, the organization has developed a strong network of donors and supporters, both individuals and businesses, and has grown steadily, building hospital and mission partners, as well as recipients. Their 23,000 square foot warehouse, built in 2006, has turned over twice in the last year. "We have many, many recipients who are repeat shippers with us," says Winson, "they've seen the quality we provide and so they come back to us. We have very strong relationships there."

As for expanding their organization beyond the Illinois and Wisconsin hospital partners, Winson says not so fast, "the Sisters and I agree that we do not want to get so big that we lose our mission and we lose the care that we're giving." With that in mind, they have set a 300 mile perimeter in terms of hospital partners. However, as far as the developing world is concerned, "there's no limit there," says Winson. "We are very open to serving as many people as we can possibly serve, just so we maintain quality and make sure we are operating in a way that's efficient and effective."

They are also open to supporting the expansion of this type of program by educating other organizations around the country that may want to become an MSRO. "We've had people from other states ask about our process," says Winson. "The need is there and we've developed a mechanism and a process and we're definitely willing to support the expansion of this type of program."

Mission Outreach not only delivers medical supplies to developing countries, they also deliver respect, love and a chance for a healthful life. "I would say the ultimate goal of Mission Outreach is to communicate Christ's love to people around the world by reducing suffering and supporting health," states Winson, "it's as simple as that."

So now a hospital ward in Jeremie, Haiti, has new beds and mattresses and their surgical operating room is outfitted with updated equipment, a child in the Philippines is safely at home with her family thanks to a donated respiratory machine, a village in Argentina now has an ambulance, a clinic in Kenya has equipment and supplies to treat its patients and the residents of a small city in Guatemala are about to receive a mobile clinic.

The reason this is all possible comes down to two simple words. Mission Outreach. ☀