

November, 2009

Dear Volunteers and Friends of Health Frontiers:

We are just back from an inspiring visit in Laos with the HF volunteer team, their Lao colleagues, and the pediatric and medicine residents. It is almost twenty years since we were able to return to Laos in January 1990... which led to Health Frontiers being formed in 1991... which led to the long line of HF volunteers, who helped the handful of Lao pediatricians and internists to establish the training programs. With last summer's graduation, we have now helped the Lao to produce 50 new pediatricians, and 29 new internists, spreading out across the country, and increasingly involved in the teaching. This is an incredible story, and many deserve credit for it: the visionary Lao originators, the intensely motivated residents, our friends at Khon Kaen, as well as the hundreds of HF volunteer faculty and friends.

But with due respect to all the rest of us, the key contribution was probably made by the relatively few HF volunteers who stayed on in Laos a year or more to help nurture the project. The first HF coordinator was Dr. Layet Chounlamounry. Then: pediatrician Julie Brown and Tom Agosti, 92-93; pediatrician Jack Lloyd, 93-94; pediatrician Paula Brinkley, 94-96; Laos expert Bill Tuffin, 96-97; pediatrician David Allison, internist Jan Goldthwait and two children, 97-98; pediatrician Dan Lu, physician Nancy and child, 98-99; pediatrician Kristine Torjesen and Brian Bramson, 99-00; pediatrician Miriam Laufer, 00-01; pediatrician Shanna Bunce and three children, 01-02; pediatrician Leila Srouf and Bryan Watt, 02-present; internist Rory Ramsey and Margareta Ramsey, 02-04; pediatrician Melanie (Rosenberg) Anspacher, 04-05 (continuing to the present in the US as HF Laos project director; internist Greg Gordon, physician Rosemary and child, 04-05; pediatrician/internist Jon White and internist Rose Quirk, 05-06; internist-pediatrician Cindy Chu, 06-08; pediatrician Louisa Mackenzie and Kevin Mottershead, 06-07; pediatrician Margot Anderson, 07-08; pediatrician Angela Luangkhut, 08-09; nephrologist Christine Johns, 08-10; pediatrician Amy Gray, 09-10. These are serious volunteers, most of them giving up six figure incomes at home, for a modest living stipend and, yes, a compelling project in Laos.

The current HF Laos team is led by Christine Johns, from Idaho and Minnesota, the internal medicine coordinator, now in her second volunteer year. The pediatric coordinator is Amy Gray, newly arrived from Melbourne, Australia, with her husband, engineer Chris French. She also has a part time research project with WHO. And, in their eighth volunteer year with HF Laos, Leila Srouf and Bryan Watt are back in Muang Sing, at the far edge of the Lao health system, after waiting a year for that project to be approved in the new HF project agreement. Leila also coordinates CME for the Lao pediatricians, and Bryan manages the accounting for HF Laos. Latest news for old volunteers: Sou (our Lao assistant) had a baby boy in October, nicknamed Bonus. She plans to move to Belgium with her Lao diplomat husband.

The new HF Laos project agreement runs to 2013, with room for adaptations, and for phasing out some of our current roles. There are new avenues for former volunteers. Jon White and Rose Quirk are supporting fellowship training in Thailand for selected

residency graduates. And Marlene Goodfriend and a group of psychiatrists from several countries are working with the Lao to develop a sorely needed mental health training program. A key team member is Manivone Thikey, soon to graduate as a PhD psychologist from Brown, who wants to move back to Laos and help build a mental health program. HF is facilitating the planning, and we may become more deeply involved.

Thanks to a wonderful long-term volunteer offer, HF hopes in 2010 to expand our help to the desperately understaffed Bwaila Maternity Hospital in Lilongwe, Malawi. Laura Chambers-Kersh, a family physician with a fellowship in obstetrics, has agreed to spend at least a year in Lilongwe, starting later in 2010, helping the staff, the mothers and babies, and building what we hope may become a training program, based on the in-country training model in Laos. Laura and pediatrician Kristine Torjesen, who identified the tragic needs at Bwaila several years ago, will visit Malawi early next year to begin planning the program. We are open to more volunteers and supporters for Malawi.

In the Children-in-Disasters project this year, HF supported efforts in Pakistan and Sudan, both with timely outcomes. As many of you know, Karen and her colleagues at Case have for many years offered volunteer workshops around the world on the special needs of children in disasters. When the recent Taliban attack in the Swat Valley created a million refugees, colleagues and graduates from two earlier workshops in Peshawar swung into action, and HF---with help from some of you---wired them money, knowing it would be well spent. And when the Sudan course was all set to go last January, but had a snafu on funding, HF became---again with help from some of you---the instant sponsor of the course. The success of the disaster management workshops has allowed HF to reduce its involvement in this project over the years, but that can change.

In Uganda, some of you are helping us not to forget the HIV-infected babies we studied there over the decades, some of them now teenage orphans. We have an active school fees program for the survivors. Others are helping the children at Mulago Hospital in Kampala. An American extended family, one of whose members volunteered at Mulago a decade ago, still assembles an annual contribution for the poorest children, and routes it through HF. Our colleagues at other institutions also route their Uganda humanitarian contributions through HF because we charge zero overhead.

In sum, we think you'll agree it's been a pretty good 20 years for all of us who identify with Health Frontiers. The estimated value of the professional time and travel of HF volunteers is more than \$500,000 per year. Our cash expenses in the year ended 9/30/09 were \$191,295. We are a 501(c)(3) public charity, registered in Minnesota, with a volunteer board of colleagues and family members. We currently have no grant support, but a growing family of volunteers and individual supporters. Our long term volunteers are the major donors. The cash contributions of the rest of us are much needed and much appreciated. And we can give skills. We are, as our slogan says, "an all volunteer outreach of health professionals." As in Laura to Malawi.

With our warm regards,

Karen Olness MD, Medical Director

Hakon Torjesen, President