

Lesley Wood

*Perioperative Care Nurse Consultant,
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"It's important for staff in resource-poor communities to see what amazing people they've got - this is how I believe we can move things forward"

Lesley Wood has been a perioperative care nurse consultant for the past twenty five years across anaesthetics, recovery and scrub - covering all areas of surgical specialisation within the NHS and the private sector. As an active member of Addenbrooke's Abroad and a Trustee of Friends of African Nurses, her volunteering work in Africa on three separate occasions and a visit to Nepal through Addenbrooke's Abroad in July 2009 - has meant that she has played an active role in setting up safe perioperative care procedures within CUHFT , helping to improve their overall safety and effectiveness.

"I am absolutely petrified of flying - but when I think of the professional and personal journey I undertake while volunteering, I'm encouraged to get myself on the plane.

It really does put life in perspective and allows me to reassess how things are done back here in the UK. I tend to fuss less about the small things and look at the bigger picture".

In resource-poor communities you'll often find hospitals where there is a shortage of trained staff, poor basic infrastructure, inadequate supplies of drugs and essential equipment, poor working conditions, low staff morale, lack of communication and poor management. Patients do not have the preventative medicine facilities within what we would term primary care leading to - particularly within obstetrics - high mortality/morbidity.

"When there is a lack of resources there is often late pathology with the diagnosis, which means that almost every case is extreme and this is what I find really fascinating - we never see such severe cases from what we might pick up as relatively minor illnesses in the UK, they would have been treated months, sometimes years, before. Every day is a

life or death situation which puts a lot of pressure on the nurses who are often expected to multi-task. Once you've won their confidence you can really make effective change within the hospital structure - which in turn may revolutionise the patient journey.

Once I've done a baseline audit of theatres it's important to follow-up with templates offering advice and implementing simple systems like swab boards, instrument lists and a strong support structure for staff members. Often these hospitals work with severe shortages of equipment and personnel - we have to advise within the strictures of time, place and country hopefully enabling change within their means. This can make a world of difference to the functioning of a surgical unit - and most importantly it can save lives.

I've established some special working and personal relationships with the nurses and staff members I've spent time working with and they are really grateful for the work that we do. It makes you feel like you've made a contribution to something good. Being there has also taught me to go back to basics. Since volunteering we've gone back to washing all our instruments in soap and water which is just as effective as washing it in chlorine. It's all about sharing knowledge and looking at ways in which you can make things better - you've simply got to work with what you've got".

"I would highly recommend volunteering to all CUH Staff and students - you'll come back feeling totally refreshed and extremely motivated".