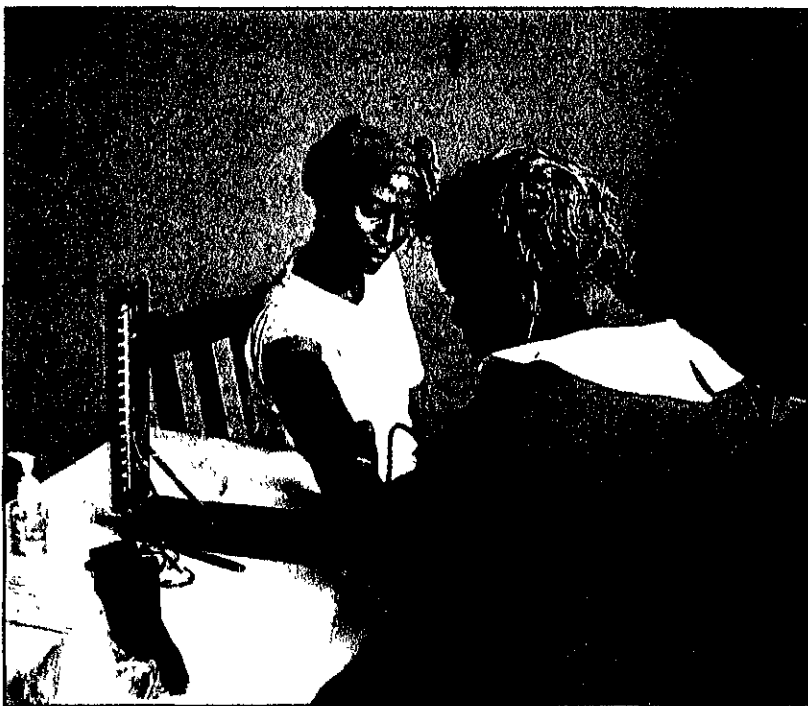


Local medical mission makes inroads into Ghana



Photographs courtesy Dr. Edem Agamah

The village midwife, called "Auntie Sara," helps the team take blood pressure during the health fair.

By TAMARA BROWNING

STAFF WRITER

For approximately two years, Dr. Edem Agamah's living room in his Springfield home wasn't full of new furniture the way he had anticipated, but instead with boxes of medical supplies.

Agamah was collecting supplies — not sofas and chairs — for an anticipated medical mission trip to his native Agbozume, Ghana.

That sacrifice eventually paid off. The supplies became critical this summer when they were donated to a hospital in the Volta region of Ghana.

"... There was some major trauma the night before (they arrived) in the operating room," Agamah says.

"The surgeon in charge was in the operating room all through the night. They depleted their supplies of gloves and gauzes. Our gauzes and gloves were a godsend to them."

Agamah is the founder of the not-for-profit medical mission organization International Health

and Development Network. He traveled with a team of medical personnel and other professionals, including some from Illinois, Ohio and Tennessee, to Ghana in July and August.

One of his goals was to rejuvenate a health clinic he established there two years ago that had suspended operations because there weren't enough committed workers.



Agamah

The team also distributed medical supplies to hospitals, sponsored a four-day health fair and set up a Health and Development Institute.

A video presentation of the trip will be given at 6:30 p.m. today at Hope Evangelical Free Church, 3135 Old Jacksonville Road. The public is invited, and there will be a question-and-answer period.

Agamah is now an American cit-

izen with a practice at the Central Illinois Hematology Oncology Center, 319 E. Madison St. He wants to share the love of Jesus Christ with Ghanaians and help them develop the ability to solve problems.

When it comes to health, for example, life expectancy for a Ghanaian man is age 54 and for a woman, 58, according to HealthNet Ghana (www.healthnet.org/hnet/gha.html). The infant mortality rate is 82 per 1,000 births.

The team's four-day health fair helped hundreds of Ghanaians with medical care. Screenings were conducted in high blood pressure, diabetes, anemia and breast cancer. Thousands of people received medication.

Hypertension, malaria, diabetes and degenerative joint diseases were common. A few diagnosed cases of breast cancer were referred to hospitals.

When some people think of Africa, they tend to think of disaster relief, war, misery and poverty,

See **GHANA** on page 22



Photograph courtesy Dr. Edem Agamah

At the health fair, several hundred people wait to be called to receive clinical attention. Some traveled 5-10 miles by foot to wait to be seen.

GHANA

From page 21

Agamah says, and not the African people themselves, who are friendly, intelligent, conscientious and hardworking.

"They have been disadvantaged over the years," he says. "We have to find creative ways to give them opportunities. What we have done is to give them hope.

"There's hope and healing in Jesus Christ. Jesus came to teach and demonstrate the example on how to live on this earth."

The institute implemented by the team addressed the needs of Ghanaians with

schools in Christian leadership, computer science and community health worker training programs.

The response was so big that in some cases screening tests were used to reduce the number of students to a manageable size.

For example, more than 100 people who showed up for computer training were given intense math and English tests.

Eventually 25 top scorers, ranging from teens to those in their 70s, learned about computer hardware and software on mostly 386 computers donated by St. John's Hospital, Memorial Medical Center and individuals.

His students were intelligent, attentive and courteous, says Tim Rice, systems manager for the state legislative information system, who taught the classes.

"The barrier for them was that they had never been exposed to the technology at all," Rice says.

"For many of them, they'd never even used a typewriter, so the concept of using a keyboard to enter something had to be explained."

Rice plans to go back this summer to teach more advanced skills to the first class, who he hopes eventually will teach others.

"Their potential is every bit as great as what we have in anybody here," Rice says.

"It's a matter of having the stuff there so that they can begin to learn it and utilize it. They can do everything that we've done and more."

A new enterprise development project has been proposed to help Ghanaians acquire basic skills on how to conduct their businesses effectively.