



Photos by Layla Farmer

From left: Becky Larkai, Winifred Nyarko and Dinah Asahte-Mensah.

Ghanaian nurses come to town to gain life-saving skills

BY LAYLA FARMER
THE CHRONICLE

Three nurses from Ghana are visiting Forsyth Medical Center this week to learn new ways to save the lives of expectant mothers and babies back home.

An estimated 560 women out of every 100,000 in the West African nation die while giving birth.

Dinah Asahte-Mensah, Becky Larkai and Winifred Nyarko, all of whom hail from the Ridge Hospital in Accra, Ghana's capital and largest city, made the trip to Sara Lee Center for Women's Health as part of an ongoing collaborative project designed to improve birth outcomes for women and children in their native country.

"I feel so elated and happy," Asahte-Mensah, a head nurse at Ridge, said of her visit to Forsyth Medical, which was made possible by the nonprofit Kybele, Inc.

Kybele works with medical teams in areas around the globe that suffer from high infant and maternal mortality rates to provide teaching opportunities and implement policies and procedural tactics that increase the survival rates for mothers and their babies.

"I consider global maternal mortality as my problem," said Dr. Medge Owen, Kybele's founder. "If we have the resources here (in America) ... to do something about it, then we should."

The organization has conducted medical training in eight countries since 2003, and enjoys the support of 200 medical volunteers hailing from 45 institutions worldwide.

In 2007, the Kybele organization launched a five-year



Dr. Medge Owen, Dr. Vernon Ross and Shelma Williams.

joint collaboration with the Ghana Health Service to address the high maternal mortality rates in the West African nation, focusing specifically on Ridge Hospital. Members of the medical community in the U.S. and abroad have visited the country several times to assess the unique challenges Ghanaian medical professionals face in facilitating healthy births. Among them was Nurse Shelma Williams.

"I think it was a culture shock in the beginning, when I first went," said Williams, who has visited the country three times, "but now I am just so eager to go."

The women are the first nurses from Ridge to visit the Sara Lee Center and witness American methods firsthand.

"Our setup in Ghana is very different from the U.S.," reported Nyarko, who manages the antepartum (before childbirth) ward at Ridge. "Here, they have a big unit with different departments... the atmosphere here is calm, cool, compared to our setup."

Dr. Vernon Ross, who has also visited Ghana through

Kybele, says the nurses' visit provided a valuable teaching opportunity.

"These are all people who can go back and execute change in their hospital," commented Ross, an associate professor of anesthesiology at Wake Forest School of Medicine. "We're so glad that they're coming over ... to see how we work here. If they see it, then they can take it back."

Owen, an obstetric anesthesiologist at Wake Forest University School of Medicine who practices at the Sara Lee Center, credits the medical staff at Ridge, and especially the three women who made the trip, with the strides the hospital has made in recent years.

"We come three times a year for one to two weeks - we're not making the improvements; they're making the improvements," she said. "These women are really pioneers, because they're changing the system."

For more information about Kybele Inc., visit www.kybeleworldwide.org.