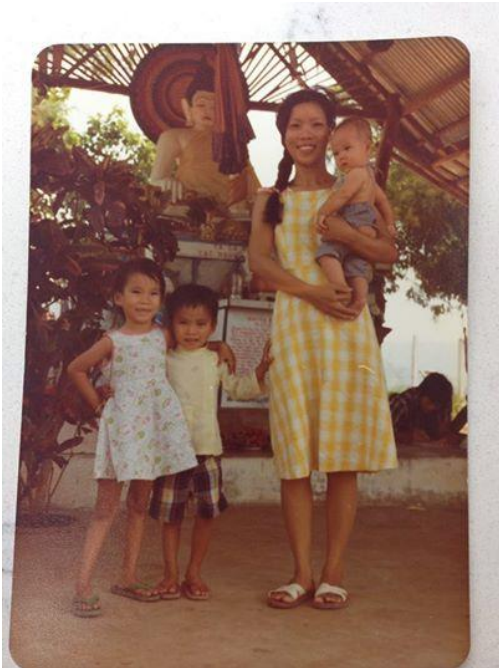


Hello Medhat and the rest of my ISMS Ghana 2014 family,
Once again, thank you so much for the opportunity to travel, work, and learn from ISMS. It was an awesome experience that will be with me forever. I am looking forward to more trips to come! I was going to sit down and write a whole dissertation on my thoughts and feelings about the trip. But I think it is better to give you snapshots of my facebook blog that I wrote at the end of each day during the trip. My thought and feelings are unedited, raw emotions, without filter. You take what you think is appropriate for ISMS website. Thanks.



1 Month before trip, my inspiration for going on a surgical mission:

As a scrawny 8 year old girl in the refugee camp of Phanat Nikhom Thailand, I beat up a few boys . As retaliation, they ganged up on me one day, held me down and forced another young boy to kiss me. I was quite traumatized by this incident. Not so much because I was 8 years old and think boys have cooties. But because this little boy had a complete bilateral cleft lip and palate. Yup, that was my first kiss. I gave this poor boy so much grief. It was not until I became a nurse practitioner and got involved with reconstructive surgery, did I understand that the little boy with the cleft lip and palate was the true victim of the above childhood prank. Children with uncorrected cleft lip & palate often suffer speech delay, hearing problems, learning difficulties, feeding difficulties, frequent respiratory infections, in addition to being socially ostracized. In attempt to make up for my childhood misdeeds, I am joining International Surgical Mission Support (isms) on their surgical mission to Ghana this March. ISMS will be sending 4 surgical teams to provide reconstructive, general, and ob/gyn surgeries & medical care to the poorest of the poor in Ghana. The team members volunteer their time, money, and skills to make this mission a reality.

Night before the trip:

Luggage? check! Passport? check! Wonder Woman outfit? check! All set to fly to Ghana tonight and change the world one small deed at a time. Thank you to all my family, friends, and colleagues for your financial and spiritual support!



Day 1:

Layover in beautiful Amsterdam, Netherlands. Visited the Anne Frank Museum, it is one thing to read her diary, but to see and be in the safe house that she described really brings the experience to life.



Day 2:

Hot. Humid. Desperately poor. Took us 2 hrs to get out of airport. Taxi drivers fighting to get our business. But made it to the hotel in one piece. First shower & sleep in 40 hrs! Now getting ready for another 1 hr plane ride & 2 hr bus ride to our final destination at Holy Family hospital in Techiman, Ghana



Day 3:

Spent all day unpacking 4 crates of supplies. Trying to bring a 3rd world hospital up to par with our 1st world medical team. Now getting a break and making local friends



The view from my 4 star hotel room. At least I have a flushing toilet & running water. I feel a lot safer with the barbed wires :) A stark contrast compared to the view from my humble bedroom in Fremont, CA.



Day 4:

Sweating like a pig & working hard, but enjoying myself. Spent the day stocking up on supplies, getting the OR ready and triage patients with Plastic Surgeon, Dr. Metha. Plastics team have a lot of burn patients. Open fire + kids = burn = contracture = loss of

function. Let's hope we can release this contracture and give this boy back his elbow range of motion.



These Ghanaian nurses Linda & Piecey drew the short straw & got stuck working with and get grilled by "Mean-hanh" (my nickname given to me by my beloved ED nurses at Kaiser San Jose)... The RNs here go to school for 3 yrs after high school & have to take a board exam, just like we do. They work 6 days a week, 8-12 hr days, & get paid equivalent of \$400 USD per month. enough to give them a fairly comfortable life.



Day 5:

Took a walk before work this morning. Stumbled upon an elementary school. The kids were adorable. They asked for money or gifts, wanting to avoid a mob scene, I offered to pay for their morning snack. Paid these ladies \$16 usd each to buy their entire food stall. Apparently I overpaid. That is what they make in 1 week, not one day. Imagine that, an Asian who can't do math! Regardless, the kids made my day.





For anyone who complains about my second home (Kaiser San Jose ED) being overcrowded, overworked, understocked, under paid, and out of control, check this out: The ED of Holy Family Hospital in Techiman, Ghana. Ed treatment room: Pts get 1 chair if they are lucky, no treatment bed. The resuscitation room: 2 O2 tanks & several reused nasal canulas & o2 masks. The ED theater (they call the OR the theater), kinda like the trauma room, several canisters of gauze, an u/s machine, suction canister, & a few saline bottles.





Day 6:
Just can't avoid my ob/gyn past, even when in Africa!





For my ob/gyn peeps, check this out: the maternity ward: waiting area for csection = the hallway & lawn area. Post c-section day 1, you get a gurney bed, if u are the 1st 6 patients. Post c-section day 2, you get the mattress on the floor. Post c-section day 3, you get the floor, if u r lucky to score a corner!

The statistics: normal vaginal births are usually done at local birthing centers. Holy Family hospital only deal with high risk pregnancies, they have 5,000 deliveries/year. 10 c-sections a day. 6 ob/gyn on staff. Maternal mortality rate = 3%, infant mortality rate: 1 newborn every day.





Day 7:
630 am, starting my 14 hour workday. Didn't sleep well. Keep on thinking about the 12 y.o. Girl burn victim we took care of yesterday. Her facial burn scars were beyond cosmetic repair. We did skin grafting. To help her able to close severely scarred and

contracted eyelids and close several non healing wounds. She has a hx of seizures. The er nurse in me can't help but wonder if her seizures are from multiple head traumas from being abused and her burn patterns are not from a simple trip and fall into boiling oil. Held her hands and looked into her frightened, timid eyes as she went under anesthesia. Hope I was able to let her know that at least for one brief moment in time, she was genuinely loved and cared for. pix of me making friends with a local boy boiling water over an open fire, # cause of child hood accident here



Love visiting the pediatric ward /nicu after work. The families stay in the hospital to tend to their family member's needs. Nurses only do wound care, pass meds, & assist the docs. Here's the family members washing the patients clothes. there's a kitchen in the back for them to cook.





Day 8:

Best part of my job is holding these beautiful babies. This little girl will sock me in the nose if she can. These kids must be thinking why are all these strange looking people holding me. Great to see ISMS team New York with 18 members from so different backgrounds come together to do some awesome work!



Day 9:

It's 9 pm & we just finished working a 14 hr day. Gotta eat dinner & hopefully get a shower. But have to share some awesome before & after pictures with my friends.



Goiters from iodine deficiency had become almost nonexistent in the States, but still very common in many 3rd world countries. Why do I suddenly crave some iodine supplemented salty potato chips?



Day 10:
Nursing 101 at its best, see one, do one, teach one.



Day 11:

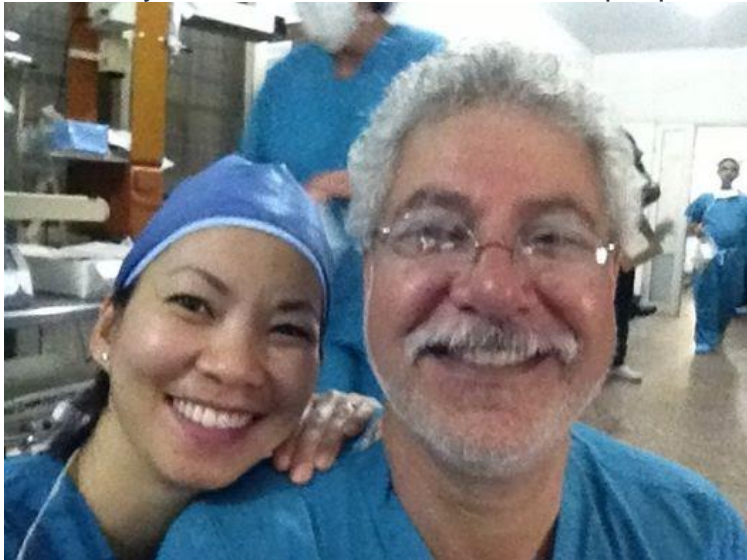
Had breakfast with the Bishop of Techiman (ISMS is not affiliate with any religion), followed up on some of our patients, did some last minute cases, said our heartfelt goodbyes. Long day. Can you see the physical and mental exhaustion?







Dr. Medhat Allam, cofounder of International Surgical Mission Support. He asked me before I left for Ghana, how do I feel about going, here's my answer "Very excited but also feeling a bit crazy. I'm leaving hubby, my kids, & my union protected job to go to a third world country where there's archaic medical care, malaria, yellow fever, typhoid. All to work my ass off for free with a bunch of people I met on the Internet! "



On March 13, 2014, I left the good old USA to return to the 3rd world conditions that my parents tried so hard to shelter me from. I worked 14 hr days, often skip lunch, ate nothing but chicken & fried rice for dinner everyday, saw things that just broke my heart, did things that overflowed my heart, met people who will inspire me for a lifetime, planted some educational seeds, grew personally and professionally, while making some incredible friends,..... and all I got is this lousy tshirt and a lifetime of memories!



Day 12:

Recovering at Labadi hotel. It the best hotel in all of Ghana. \$400 USD per night to stay here. equivalent to a Ghanian nurses's one month salary. so sad to see the extremes between the rich and the poor here. This after trip is funded by the individual participants, not ISMS donated funds. To save \$, we shared rooms.





Day 13:

As medical volunteers, we have to buy medi vac insurance, so we can be helicoptered out of disaster areas if we need emergency medical care not available locally. However, falling 200 ft down the rainforest canopy while crossing a tiny suspension bridge, while wearing flip flops, while taking a selfie may violate Medi-Vac Insurance's stupidity clause. But definitely should be a part of everyone's bucket list!





Ghana is also known as the Gold Coast. Known for its gold mines & slave trade. Visited Cape Castle, one of several slave trade ports from the 1600-1800's. unbelievable the conditions of the slave dungeons where the slaves were kept, the open marketplace where slave auctions took place, and the Door of No Return, where they are shipped like sardines into cargo ships headed for the Americas. They closed us in on one of the dungeons for a few seconds, I can almost hear and feel the human suffering that took place there not so long ago. A very sad part of human history.





Day 14:

Layover in Amsterdam, first part of my 30 hr journey home. Feels like a lifetime had passed. It was a wonderful journey & hope I inspired some of my Facebook friends to live freely, spontaneously, with charity, compassion, and joy in all that you do. Going on an African surgical mission is definitely something to cross off on your bucket list. But it's gonna take me some time to detox mentally & physically. Might stick around Amsterdam for a while and do this:

