Press release

**A BRITISH SURGEON’S MERCY MISSION TO HELP PEOPLE OF AFRICA**

Two-thirds o the world’s population cannot get access to safe surgery when they need it. As a result, 17 million people die every year from conditions requiring surgery. This is higher than the number who die from TB, malaria and HIV/Aids combined. Mercy Ships is working to tackle this crisis. We operate the largest charity-run hospital ship in the world, delivering free, safe medical care to some of the world’s least-developed countries. This floating hospital is staffed by volunteers, who give their expertise for free to help treat dental and eye problems, cleft lips and palates, tumours, club feed, childbirth injuries, burns and various other conditions.

Leo Cheng, an Oral, Maxillofacial, Head and Neck Surgeon at the Royal London and Homerton University Hospitals, London, returned from Conakry, Guinea, West Africa earlier this year as he served on board the world’s largest non-governmental hospital ship – the *Africa Mercy* - where he performed life-saving operations to some of the poorest people of Africa.

This was his 16th trip to West Africa where he offered his skills and time, along with other surgeons and nurses, to provide corrective and reconstructive surgery to people suffering from large tumours, cleft lips and war wounds.

Every crew member, including the captain, surgeons, nurses, dentists, hygienists, chef, engineers, electricians and cleaning staff are volunteers who pay for their own accommodation on board and transport to the ship. Hence all the donations to the Mercy Ships go directly to the maintenance of the hospital ship and patient care.

Speaking about his recent trip, Leo said: “Publicity in the UK often focuses on a few desperate patients being flown into UK for reconstructive facial surgery but with Mercy Ships, we provide world class quality treatment for patients in the poorest countries of the world, on their door step. We know that 90 of the world’s biggest cities are port cities, offering easy access to the ship for people without health care.” “I have been involved in removing massive tumours of the thyroid, jaws, head and neck region. Underneath each disfigured person, there is a human being who has been ostracized and treated as a witch and demon. Watching each patients’ recovery has been miraculous as they start to lift their heads and eyes up to regain their self-esteem. The joy shown by patients seeing themselves on their given hand-mirror after surgery was indescribable. The Ship’s motto is ‘bringing hope and healing’, but I have not just gone out and given, I have received much more in return. Working with so many selfless people serving together is very fulfilling and uplifting.’

In addition to the dramatic transforming surgery on board the Mercy Ships, medical and nursing teams establish capacity building and training of local doctors and nurses among hospitals within the host country. Dental teams also establish land-based field clinics carrying out dental care, minor operations and medical screening, as well as supporting the training of local dentists and nurses.

**Spreading the miraculous work of the Mercy Ships:**

Last month, Leo presented Mercy Ships’ talks and organized a trade stand in an International Conference for over 2000 Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons and their teams in Rio, Brazil. The stand attracted over 100 surgeons and their trainees who signed up to be volunteers or donors. Some delegates were emotionally touched by the ‘before and after’ images and stories of desperate patients whose lives were changed by the free world class transforming surgery.

Leo did a TED-talk style Mercy Ships presentation at the Royal Albert Hall, London, UK a few years ago to over 4,000 people. You can watch his presentation on youtube ‘leo cheng offshore medicine’.

**About Mercy Ships:**

Mercy Ships is an international Charity that provides free medical care and humanitarian aid to the poorest countries in Africa through its ship – the *Africa Mercy*. The *Africa Mercy* is the world’s largest charity hospital ship. It has 80-bed wards, five operating theatres, x-ray facilities, a CT scanner, blood bank and laboratory facilities.

Since 1978, Mercy Ships has visited 56 countries, providing services worth more than £1.2 billion that have directly helped more than 2.7 million people. We have also trained 42,250 local professionals in their areas of expertise to leave a legacy that lasts.

For more information visit [www.mercyships.org.uk](http://www.mercyships.org.uk)