



Frontlines: Life in Congo

MSF Volunteer: Dara Singh, Anaesthesiologist

Mission: MASISI, D. R. Congo

I worked with MSF (Médecins sans Frontières) at the Masisi referral hospital in North-Kivu Province in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Although the duration of my mission was short, my experience was professionally and culturally enriching. I also made a lot of good friends.

Masisi is a town and administrative district in the North-Kivu Province. Masisi district covers a large area and population. The hospital in Masisi town is a 175 bed secondary health care centre. The facilities at the hospital are limited and most of the specialists are looked after by general

physicians. The only specialists are Anaesthetist and Surgeon both of whom are MSF staff. The hospital in Masisi is supported by MSF. MSF provides logistics, medicines, machines, monetary support and expertise staff in the form of nurses, doctors, and midwives. MSF is also looking after health centres around Masisi and conducts special

campus for operating the obstetric fistulas. The more serious patients are taken to Goma, capital of North-Kivu and brought back by MSF after



treatment. Goma is situated on the banks of Lake Kivu, 80km east-south of Masisi. It takes 3-12hrs depending upon season and security.

OPERATION THEATER

The hospital in Masisi has two operating rooms. During my stay at Masisi, some 90 cases were operated out of which 50 percent were of emergency nature. During the same period the fistula project was also running. In sub-Saharan Africa the incidence of obstetric fistulas is very high and the patients of fistula live a miserable life. They are out casted from society and sometimes their husbands abandon them due to this problem. Lately, MSF is conducting camps especially for obstetric fistulas. The last camp treated some 40 patients and carried out 26 repair surgeries.

Due to lack of resources only emergency cases are operated during the normal course of work. Majority of emergencies are obstetric ones as D.R. Congo has the maximum number of rape survivors. Other emergency cases were gunshot injuries, road traffic accidents and burns (especially children).



One particular case worth mentioning was of a 37 year old female with haemoperitoneum, accumulation of blood between the inner lining of the abdominal wall and the internal abdominal organs. This patient was kept in the recovery room for monitoring. Her BP started to fall while the pulse rate

kept increasing. The abdomen was swollen. The Surgeon was called in and as soon as we opened the abdomen, we found that it was full of blood. We collected some two litres of blood and haemostasis was ensured to stop the flow of blood. Next day, one of MSF staff (Jean Marie) volunteered to

donate his blood as he was the only one having the same blood group as the patient. This helped us save the life of the patient.

Life in Congo

Not only did I enjoy working, I also enjoyed the social life in D.R. Congo. The people I worked with during my mission were very nice, friendly and caring. I also met people from India. The Head of UN peace keeping mission in Masisi was from Himachal Pradesh. It is easy to find Indians in South Africa, Kenya and also in some cities of D.R. Congo but to be able to speak in Hindi and have Indian food in Masisi was an extra -ordinary experience.

I like to know more about the place where I am working. The information provided by MSF and my discussions with whomever I encountered during my stay has given me good insights about life in D.R. Congo. I was amazed to find that D.R. Congo was the only country owned by a single person – King Leopold of Belgium – as his personal property for 10 years; that there are no coins in circulation in Congo, only currency notes; that mountain gorillas are found in only three countries, Congo being one of them; that the river Congo after which the country is named is the deepest river in the world and crosses the equator twice; that outdoor photography is prohibited by law. I feel both personally and professionally enriched with this beautiful experience.

I thank MSF for giving me a chance to work in such a wonderful environment. I am already looking forward to work with MSF again.

MSF is urgently looking for ORTHOPAEDIC SURGEONS:

Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) is an international medical humanitarian organization, providing assistance to populations in danger. Each year, over 4,000 medical and non-medical professionals are recruited to volunteer in over 70 countries around the world. MSF has been awarded the 1999 Nobel Peace Prize for its services around the globe.



MSF is looking for Orthopaedic Surgeons for its missions in Sri Lanka and Nigeria. These specialists can go on shorter assignment ranging from 6 weeks to three months. Apart from this profile, MSF is also interested in other medical profiles.

website.

Those interested in applying should upload their application (including CV and application form) on the website by signing up as new user. The application form is downloadable from the MSF

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