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## CALENDAR

January 12-21, 2017

Harbel, Liberia

February 8-19, 2017

Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

March 9-19, 2017

Thanh Hoa, Vietnam

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## SAVE THE DATE!



THE 13<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL

# CSI GALA

## Saturday, April 8, 2017

Radisson Blu  
Mall of America

Mark your calendars for an evening dedicated to celebrating CSI's mission and the people who support our work.

## Returning to Liberia

by Amy Fischer

It has been two years since the Ebola virus crisis ravaged West Africa and led to the cancellation of the November 2014 CSI mission to Liberia. But thanks to an improved medical infrastructure and Ebola prevention procedures that were put in place, the country has stabilized. And it is with much anticipation that CSI will return to Liberia in January to continue our life-changing work there.

A team of 21 CSI volunteers will travel to Liberia from Jan. 12-21 in partnership with Firestone Natural Rubber to perform surgeries at the Firestone Duside Hospital in Harbel.

"The country is back to normal. You wouldn't know now that there had been such a devastating crisis," says Don Darden, Director of Administrative Operations at Firestone Natural Rubber Company. Darden travels frequently from his office in Nashville to the Firestone facility in Liberia and champions CSI's work there.

CSI's partnership with Firestone began in 2010 with the first trip to Firestone Duside Hospital. The hospital serves nearly 8,000 people – all Fireside employees, their dependents and retirees. But the patients seen by the CSI team come from primarily rural areas of Liberia to receive services that would not otherwise be available to them. In addition to providing its hospital facilities for the CSI mission, Firestone also pays for the families' transportation, food and accommodations.

"These surgeries seem routine, but they are life-changing to the families here," Darden says. **"These children get a shot at living a normal life, free from social stigma. Plus, the training and expertise that CSI brings here makes the staff at our hospital better."**

Mary Johnson, a nurse at Children's Hospital in Minneapolis, has been to Liberia multiple times with CSI. She is a CSI board member and the go-to person for ordering and procuring donations of suture and other surgical supplies. She agrees that the work CSI does in Liberia has had a significant impact.

"The first year we went to Liberia was soon after their civil war, and we saw the devastation of the country. Each time we go back we see a glimmer of hope as we see the redevelopment of the country," Johnson says. **"There is such a great need to provide this type of care."**

Johnson says the CSI mission of training the local staff has been a success. "They have changed some of their caregiving since we have been there, and we have provided a lot of nurse-to-nurse training. They are now looking at the whole patient."



Nurse Mary Johnson with a patient.



Children at Firestone Duside Hospital.



Nurse Amy Hassenstab Pedersen and patient.

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## Coming Home: Collaboration to Change Lives in Vietnam

By Wyn Huynh, C.R.N.A.

*A team of 14 volunteers completed CSI's third trip to Thanh Hoa, Vietnam, in September. Thanks to our partners at IPSAC Vietnam and Thanh Hoa Provincial Hospital, we were able to perform 24 urologic surgeries and provide focused education and training to our Vietnamese colleagues. The following trip report is from nurse anesthetist Wyn Huynh.*

Since I started my career as a nurse anesthetist, I have wanted to participate in medical mission trips to impoverished countries. I have been on a few missions around the world, but have always wanted to participate in Vietnam where I was born and lived until I was a teenager. This wish came true for me with Children's Surgery International.

In February I had the privilege of joining the CSI team on a surgical mission to Thanh Hoa, Vietnam. I loved it so much that I decided to go back for a second trip this fall.

CSI is unique to other mission organizations I have traveled with in that their goal is not only to do as many life-altering surgical cases as possible, but also to train local surgeons and other medical professionals so that when CSI teams leave the site, they are able to perform these complicated surgeries independently.

Vietnamese surgeons worked side-by-side with CSI's surgeons throughout the entire perioperative period. As an anesthesia provider, keeping the patients safe and asleep during the procedures, I am able to witness the delicate skills of guiding and teaching done by CSI's surgeons and the learning and understanding gained by the Vietnamese surgeons.

A surgical case often started with a conversation between CSI urologist Dr. David Vandersteen and Dr. Drluu Thanh, a young Vietnamese surgeon. "How do you want to approach this?" asked Dr. Vandersteen. Dr. Thanh pondered for a few seconds, then described how he would proceed. The two surgeons discussed the plan. The patient was scrubbed and ready for incision. Dr. Vandersteen asked Dr. Thanh, "Do you want to do this, or do you want me to?" and off they went. During the case, teaching skills and discussion of rationale ensued, while they made joint decisions – collaborating throughout the case.

I recall at the end of a complicated case, Dr. Vandersteen asked his Vietnamese colleague, "So, can you do this after we leave here?" Dr. Thanh, while closing the last few stitches,

stopped, paused, and for the brief moment I could catch his eyes – I noted a glimpse of uncertainty, and yet confidence. Softly under his breath, Dr. Thanh modestly said, "Yes."

We all know it takes years to become a competent surgeon. Dr. Thanh still has much to learn. What Dr. Vandersteen brought to the operating room on the other side of the world and shared with Dr. Thanh was not just knowledge and skills, but also the wisdom and confidence that said, "Yes, you will be able to do this surgery after CSI leaves Thanh Hoa, and you will continue to be able to take care of children in your community."

This collaboration of services and education as CSI's model has been carried out throughout the mission by other staff, that including nurses, surgical technicians and pediatricians. At every step of the way, the CSI team identifies, learns and utilizes the available resources at the local level, then finds ways to collaborate with and educate staff with new knowledge and techniques. Sustainable self-sufficiency is one of CSI's missions. I am thrilled and humbled to be a part of it!



Teaching in the operating room.



Wyn and CSI team members with patient.



Mother and daughter.

## Hope in Hermosillo

By Paul Melchert, M.D.

*In more developed parts of the world, a child born with a cleft lip and palate will be seen by teams of specialists many times and may require multiple surgeries. In parts of the world where resources are limited, this intensive follow-up is often impossible. Because of the support of CIMA Hospital and St. Andrew's Children's Clinic, CSI teams are able to follow children annually to evaluate their progress toward achieving more normalized speech, breathing, appearance and self-esteem.*

*A team of 19 CSI volunteers just returned from the 12th trip to Hermosillo, Mexico. A total of 122 children were screened, and 63 surgeries were performed. The following trip report is from pediatrician Dr. Paul Melchert. This was his sixth trip to Hermosillo with CSI.*

The Hermosillo mission is no longer only about the life-changing surgeries, but also the personal connections we have with the people and families. It's about the friendships with the hospital volunteers whom we spend hours working with, exchanging stories about our own families. It's also about the personal relationships with the staff of St. Andrew's Clinic with whom we work throughout the year. Relationships and bonds are strengthened as we reunite each October: CSI, St. Andrews Clinic, CIMA, and the children and their families.

A perfect example is this father (*photo to the right*). Six years ago, I left our healthy 18-month-old twin boys home in Minnesota to go to Hermosillo. On screening day, I met a terrified dad who also had twin boys. He was entrusting one of his four-month-old babies – born with a severe cleft lip and palate – to our care. After the surgery, he held a picture of the other twin up to his son's face and choked through his tears, "Now they look like twins." I saw them again the following year, when our surgeons repaired the boy's cleft palate. And just last week in Hermosillo, I saw the father again! We were both in tears as we hugged and shared stories and pictures of our twin boys, the same way we did six years ago. This father adores his sons the same way I adore mine. We are both fathers working for the hope of good health for our sons ... and so we are forever friends.



*Dr. Paul Melchert with patient and family.*

It's important to realize that the support of so many is required to make a trip like this successful year after year. I am grateful for the financial support of our donors that allows us to be able to truly transform the lives of these innocent children. This trip is hope-giving in so many ways, mostly as we realize we truly are all one people, working toward a goal of caring for, learning from and loving each other.

*Dr. Melchert is employed by Allina and works as a pediatric hospitalist at Children's Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota - St. Paul. He has also traveled with CSI to Liberia and Ethiopia. Paul and his husband, James Zimmerman, are the co-chairs for the CSI 2017 Gala, set for April 8, 2017.*



*Patient benefiting from return visits and follow-up surgeries.*



*Patients playing in pre-op.*



*Baby Alfonso.*



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## Return Service Requested

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She speaks highly of the Liberian people, especially the parents, who put complete trust in the CSI team as they "hand over their most precious commodity to us. The parents see that when we come, we do what we say we're going to do. We provide free care; we provide good care. It's amazing what they have been through, yet they are so gracious and grateful."

Both Johnson and Darden are eagerly awaiting the January mission.

**"The staff greets us when we arrive at the hospital, and it feels like we're coming home. There is such a real sense of camaraderie when we are there,"** says Johnson.

Darden agrees, saying: "There is an incredible bond between CSI and our team at the hospital. The long days and the emotions tend to build strong relationships. There is a sadness when the team leaves. We are grateful to the professionals who give up their vacation time to go to work in places that are not vacation spots. They use their skills to change lives. Firestone is proud to have been a part of it, and we are so glad it is happening again."



*The operating room.*

# DONATE

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by making a tax-deductible donation.*

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