

## Dr Keith Thomson

Keith Thomson was a newly appointed Consultant Anaesthetist going to the AAGBI meeting in Manchester in Sept 1990 and during the flight he picked up a discarded copy of the *Daily Telegraph* and read about Mercy Ships for the first time.

Six months later Keith worked on the Mercy Ship M/V Anastasis in Ghana and became committed to this work. The adventures of challenging maxillofacial surgery became part of his yearly schedule and over the next 18 years 22 more trips followed with visits to 10 different African countries. It became a passion for Keith. He became totally immersed by the vision of Mercy Ships – bringing hope and healing to people whose illness made them outcasts from their communities. These were patients with diseases such as disfiguring maxillofacial tumours, children with cleft lip/ palate and those blinded by cataracts.

With his overwhelming enthusiasm Keith has been fundraising for MS in various ways – run several marathons, organised floats in the Lord Mayor Show on six occasions, set up a charity (Shalimar Trust) and website ([www.africansmiles.co.uk](http://www.africansmiles.co.uk)) to support Mercy Ships. Keith has been a prolific writer for 'Today's Anaesthetist' with memorable articles like 'Sun, Sea but not much Sux in Sierra Leone.' He is now also Vice Chairman of MSUK.

Dr Keith, as he is known within Mercy Ships circles, has been radiating enthusiasm and passion and with amusing and challenging personal stories and excellent lectures he has encouraged anaesthetists and nurses to work on a Mercy Ship, often funding their trips. Thus the circle of influence grows.

Keith works as a consultant obstetric anaesthetist at the North Hampshire Hospital. Obstetric anaesthesia has led him to Eastern Europe in 1996 where he has organised a number of conferences on 'Medical Aspects of Childbirth'. He has taken a multidisciplinary team of obstetricians, midwives, neonatologists, and anaesthetists to countries like Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria, Russia and Uganda; hoping to make a significant difference to safety of mothers and babies in these countries.

While struck down by the illness (carcinoma of the tongue) four years ago Keith was motivated to recover from major maxillofacial surgery and radiotherapy by his desire to return to Africa.

Most recently Keith has organised anaesthetic refresher courses in Liberia in 2007 and 2008 and Sierra Leone earlier this year; these are part of the effort of changing the face of the health service in countries visited by Mercy Ships. Putting the impact of these courses into perspective – Liberia has a population of 3.5m, but the anaesthetic workforce consists only of 35 nurse anaesthetists of various degree of training and until last year not a single physician anaesthetist in the country. Over 75% of them came to Keith's course.

Keith also began to look at the equipment side of anaesthetic practice in developing countries. Africa has become the graveyard of often poorly functioning anaesthetic equipment sent by well meaning Western donors. Keith has become a great advocate of the Glostavent ([www.diamedica.co.uk](http://www.diamedica.co.uk)) and funded a total of five Glostavents from his own charity.

We are delighted that the AAGBI has decided to award a Pask certificate to Keith reflecting the admiration and respect of the international anaesthetic community for Dr Keith, and his extraordinary work and commitment over the past 18 years.

*Dr Aleksandra Bojarska*  
*Dr Iain H Wilson*