

## New Year Message

### Motec Life - UK

It is with mixed emotions that we write to you at Christmas this year. It's been a tough year for us as a charity due to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, We've been unable to make the visit we planned for October and our volunteers have been frustrated that other projects have had to be cancelled, feeling that we are letting down our Ghanaian colleagues and patients. And, more importantly, we have had to take stock of heartbreaking reports of our colleagues in West Africa succumbing to the disease. Nevertheless, against this backdrop sadness, our hard work has continued.

The tragedy of Ebola, beyond the sad stories we hear on the news, is in the knock-on effect it will have on healthcare in general. The WHO reported this year that malaria cases have fallen by 50% since 2000, but the celebrations of this triumph were short-lived, when experts realized that malaria bed nets and drugs are piling up in warehouses as distribution initiatives are being cancelled, patients with a fever are being turned away from hospital due to fear of Ebola, and many healthcare workers in a desperately understaffed areas have themselves died of Ebola. Indeed, the outbreak has virtually shut down malaria control efforts in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone. As a result, worrying figures suggest that malaria cases will rise dramatically this year. Esrella Lasry, a specialist from Medecins sans Frontiers says of the Ebola outbreak: "it's a disaster in all ways possible. The public-health impact will be huge."

This year, our project work has been curtailed, but how can we reflect on these events, to move forward and continue our work? It seems that the efforts to contain Ebola have been more successful in those countries with a stronger and more robust healthcare system. In other countries with underfunded and under-resourced health care systems, efforts have relied heavily on voluntary organisations, charities and individual volunteers. It is also in these countries where general healthcare has started to break down since the Ebola outbreak. This has highlighted to us the importance of our efforts as a voluntary organization, to supplement the existing healthcare facilities, and also to help build the capacity and skills of healthcare workers in West Africa. This is the work that, over time, will mean that healthcare systems are less fragile and reliant on voluntary support. We'll know we've been very successful when we're no longer needed.

In the eight years since MOTEC was founded, we have been incredibly lucky to see the charity go from strength to strength: we felt unstoppable. The troubles we have seen in West Africa this year have served to remind both of the fragility of the environment in which we work, and also of the importance of our work. Despite cutting our projects back (temporarily), dedicated teams of doctors and nurses in the UK and target hospitals in Ghana have continued to run excellent projects, transforming the lives of many of the underprivileged population of Ghana. The individuals who have devoted themselves to this work should be highly praised. We have now established a breast care services and education in Ghana linking two district hospitals with the main teaching hospital in Accra. Also we have worked hard to strengthen the links between the UK (Motec, London School of Postgraduate Surgery, World Orthopaedic Concern UK) and the West African College of Surgeons. The working visit last October with a limited number of volunteers, has certainly been one of the best since the establishment of these links two years ago. We have seen the progression of our long term training of specialist surgeons from Ghana within Ghana and also in the UK - linked with St Mary's hospital in London with the arrival of surgeons in London from Accra. This is expected to expand to cover the training of junior doctors from Tamale and Cape Coast Teaching Hospitals also in London. Motec expresses appreciation and great gratitude to the facilitators in UK, volunteers and the staff in Ghana. And of course, at home, our loyal friends and colleagues have continued to fundraise, spread awareness and support our volunteers.

We must not feel that we have taken a step backwards. Nothing is lost. We still have the knowledge, the experience, and the strength and numbers in our team to be able to rise to new challenges. We just need to figure out how to deploy our workers and efforts to adapt to the new situation in West Africa. We may need to be more creative, more flexible, more determined and even more driven than before. But we will work together to be able to ensure that we can continue to provide life-changing projects in Ghana and beyond.

We wish all our volunteers, supporters, friends and family a wonderful Christmas. It is through your love and hard work that we will start the new year positive and excited to rise to new challenges for 2015! Happy Christmas!

*P. Ofori-Atta & Louisa Draper*

The Presidency, Motec Life – UK. 15<sup>th</sup> December 2014



Greetings card designed by Motec webmaster Mr David Lewis