Liberia Scholarships

Thirty-eight Liberian men and women have received full ride scholarships to become nurses, laboratory technicians and social workers thanks to two Bay Area organizations. The Global AIDS Interfaith Alliance (GAIA) and Global Strategies united their efforts to help rebuild Liberia’s healthcare workforce after the devastating 2014-15 Ebola outbreak.

This year’s class of 19 scholars is the largest since the program’s inception, and representatives from Global Strategies just returned from meeting the new students in Monrovia, Liberia. “Nursing is a calling,” said Mary Le, a Global Strategies volunteer and pediatric nurse practitioner who traveled to Liberia in May, “but it is a special group of people that lived through the largest Ebola epidemic in history and responded to that call.”

In interviews, many students spoke about personal and patriotic
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motivations for becoming healthcare professionals. For some, it was a direct encounter with an inspiring nurse while for others it was the overwhelming national need after Ebola. “Liberia is a country that has gone through a lot of crises... many people out there are traumatized,” said Precious Gray, a sophomore studying social work. “I’m there to help them overcome their problems and build resilience.”

The new scholarship recipients are enrolled at the Mother Patern College of Health Sciences in Monrovia and will complete a three-year program. All of their expenses will be covered during their training. Following graduation, students will sit for licensing exams and then join the workforce.

“What is the lesson from the 2014-15 Ebola outbreak?” asks Global Strategies President, Dr. Joshua Bress. “As we follow the current outbreak in the Congo, the coverage has focused on promising new tools—vaccines and medications. But who gives these treatments? The frontline is human.”

Born in West Point, Liberia

Four square kilometers and 75,000 people—welcome to the West Point neighborhood of Monrovia, a sandy peninsula in the Liberian capital. What does it take to deliver high quality care for babies born in one of the most densely populated areas in West Africa? The answer—skilled nurses with knee-high rubber boots and photographic memories for navigating West Point’s nameless winding alleyways.

In 2014, Global Strategies partnered with Star of the Sea Clinic, the only birth center in West Point, to train nurses in newborn care. After the training, the Liberian team saw an unusual opportunity afforded by the astounding population density when nurses realized that could reach babies by foot and provide the necessary medical follow-up in the home. Four years later, these same nurses have conducted 1440 house visits of babies recently discharged from the clinic.

“This program is unique because the people visiting mothers are the same people who delivered the babies,” says Program Coordinator Jean Armas. “While this isn’t possible everywhere, the benefits are significant. A nurse is a link between patients and treatment facilities. The result is trust in medical care.”
Spotlight: Gladys Lydia McGill

Gladys Lydia McGill is a nursing student who received a scholarship through the GAIA-Global Strategies partnership. Here in her own words she describes her journey to nursing:

**EARLY LIFE** I am a Christian and the first-born of eight siblings...A Catholic sister was asked to help...giving me the opportunity to enroll at the Cathedral Catholic School from 1986-89. With everyone going in different directions due to the war, I was without schooling for three years. After graduation, I enrolled at St. Martin's Commercial Institute until the heat of the war in 1996 when I fled to Ghana.

**PURSUING NURSING** I came back home in July 2012 and was transferred to Mother Patern College of Health Sciences...I chose nursing for the fact that I have the passion. I'm surrounded by people who need healthcare.

**SCHOLARSHIP** In February 2015, it came to a point when my dream of becoming a professional nurse was going down the drain right before my very eyes...little did I know that help was on the way. I applied and was successful.
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