

mission

nursing the world over

Lizzie Chitty tells us about her time with Mercy Ships

I have wanted to be a nurse in French-speaking Africa since I was 16 years old but I couldn't have imagined the adventure God would take me on when I walked up the gangway of the world's largest civilian hospital ship. The command to love God as well as love and serve others form the core values of Mercy Ships, an organisation which uses the 2000 year old model of Jesus

to bring hope and healing to the forgotten poor through direct surgical care and capacity building training in some of the poorest nations in West Africa.

I have served in five different countries on six different trips, working across a number of surgical specialities in a few different capacities including ward nurse, women's

health nurse and infection prevention and control nurse. My favourite group of patients to work with was our obstetric fistula ladies who were survivors not just of a traumatic birth but also the stigma that comes with an injury that makes you constantly leak urine and/or faeces leading to isolation and despair.



Putting their trust in our crew of 450 volunteers from over 35 nations, these ladies come for a 45-minute surgery but get so much more than they could have bargained for. Throughout their stay in hospital, crew from all departments come and visit these ladies to paint their nails or play board games with them whilst they recover from surgery, showering love on these ladies who often have been shunned from their own communities because of how they smell and their inability to bear more children. Once they have been healed, our hospital chaplaincy team organise a ceremony where the lady gets a new dress, puts on makeup and dances with the crew members marking a



re-entry to society and hope for the future. It is a beautiful illustration of the words in Isaiah 61 which is often quoted in the ceremony especially the words *'he will give a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair'* and a joy to see how surgical care can be so life transforming. Not only have I nursed some of these ladies after surgery but also have been involved in the training of local nurses at a clinic in Madagascar that continues this work years after the ship has sailed away from the country.

Volunteering for Mercy Ships has inspired me to expand my skills in surgical nursing by taking a new direction in my career this year by becoming a theatre nurse and with a second ship coming into operation next year, I am praying for doors to be open to volunteer again.

Lizzie Chitty is currently a critical care nurse in Nottingham
For more information, see [mercyships.org/volunteer](https://www.mercyships.org/volunteer)