

Katie Johnson: Good morning and welcome to Apple a Day, Lake Region Healthcare's health and wellness segment where we feature news and information that you can use to live a healthier life. This is Katie Johnson, your host and my guest today is Dr. Will Porter. He is an ENT here at Lake Region Healthcare Clinic Services. He is our guest today to talk about a recent cleft palate surgical mission trip that he took.

Good morning Dr. Porter.

Dr. Will Porter: Good Morning Katie. Thank you for having me on your program.

Katie Johnson: Thank you for joining me. It's such a great opportunity when we get a chance to see another side of our medical staff and talk to you about some of the things that you do outside of your practice here at Lake Region Healthcare, especially when it's something with such a great story like this. Tell me a little bit about where you went and when.

Dr. Will Porter: I went to Kenya. Kenya's on the Eastern coast of Africa, in about the central portion. We went to Kijabe, which is a small town in Kenya about an hour and a half drive Northwest of Nairobi. They have a mission compound there which includes a large hospital, which has over 200 beds but we operated out of a small children's.

There was a team of eight ear, nose and throat Doctors. I was one of them. We operated out of four operating rooms and worked for a whole week. I went back in October, October 21st through, I think it was the 30th when I arrived back in the states. It was a nice, very busy one week mission trip.

Katie Johnson: Wow. What is your history? Is this your first mission or have you done this before?

Dr. Will Porter: I've been three other times. It had been a while since I had gone to Kenya. Previously it was in 2012. I started going in 2010 and in 2011 and then 2012 but then there was a four year hiatus until this year when I went in October.

Katie Johnson: This isn't a small undertaking to decide to go on a medical mission trip. What was it that sparked your interest in doing this?

Dr. Will Porter: I am a follower of Jesus and I've always had an interest in seeing the mission of the church practically being extended throughout the world. I've been interested in missions for many years. My interest has been there all along but I didn't have much opportunity to act on it until about five or six years ago.

I found out about this opportunity when I went to a medical conference sponsored by a mission organization called World Medical Missions, which is a branch of Samaritan's Purse, which you may have heard of. Samaritan's Purse is the organization that has Operation Christmas Child, where you pack up shoe boxes full of things and they're delivered to kids all over the world and a lot of times in impoverished areas.

This is a wonderful organization and they have a medical branch called World Medical Missions. I went to the conference back in 2009 and was actually invited to go on the first trip I went on by a man who's an Otolaryngologist, who had been going on these trips for 15 years and actually organized them in the first place. I was happy to accept because this was exactly how I thought I could utilize my gifts and talents as a Physician and Surgeon, to be able to benefit kids and adults in some cases, to fix up their lips and palates.

Katie Johnson: Once you get there, I had a picture in my mind of what your facilities might look like compared to what facilities are like here but from the photos you showed me, I think I was a little bit wrong. What are the facilities like there?

Dr. Will Porter: They're really very good. In many parts of developed Kenya, you have very good medical facilities. The little children's hospital that we worked out of is called the AIC Cure Hospital. AIC stands for African Inland Church and Cure is another hospital organization that has hospitals in several countries.

The hospital is a 30 bed pediatric hospital that usually is devoted most of the year to orthopedic problems and they have excellent Orthopedic Surgeons there. The ENT Doctors go three times a year for a week or two at a time. They give over the facility during that period of time to just the ENT mission.

The operating rooms are excellent. They have all of the equipment they need. The Nurse Anesthetists are fantastic and we never had a major anesthesia incident the whole time we were there. I've never had any problem with the Anesthetists there. The equipment is great. We have all of the supplies that we need.

Katie Johnson: Your focus was on cleft palate surgery. Tell us a little bit more about this type of surgery and especially the difference it could make in a person's life.

Dr. Will Porter: The cleft palate surgery, it's a chasm or a rift in the roof of the mouth that can go all of the way from the gums, all the back to the uvula. It just splits the roof of the mouth. It never properly closes during development in the mother's womb and as a result, whenever a kid with this condition eats, the food can go up into their nose. They can get nasal infections. Their speech is terrible because there's a lot of air escape through the nose, so that's a big problem for the cleft palate children.

A lot of times, the cleft palates are associated with cleft lip, although not always. When you have a cleft lip, it looks awful. It's a very disfiguring problem, so there is the physical appearance of the cleft lip patient and as a result, when they're born, a lot of times in some developing countries, children are looked at as having been cursed by the evil spirits because they're born this way.

The kids are ostracized from village life. The parents may be ostracized from village life, so it's very important, not just physically to the children, to have repair of their cleft lip particularly, but also cleft palate. It's also important to the parents because

they get reintegrated into social life as well as just having their child's physical problem fixed.

Katie Johnson: What an amazing impact. Any idea how many people you helped while you were on this mission?

Dr. Will Porter: We probably evaluated 80 patients for surgery, a little over 80 patients. We ended up operating on 53. We couldn't operate on everybody because some were ill, some were too small, or it just wasn't the appropriate timing. We ended up operating on 53 patients. There were four teams of two Doctors each for four operating rooms. I actually, personally was able to participate in 13 of these repairs, several cleft lips and several cleft palates.

Katie Johnson: How did these people respond once they were done with the surgery?

Dr. Will Porter: The patients were all pretty young. The ones I worked on, they were toddlers or infants, so they cried.

Katie Johnson: Oh, sure.

Dr. Will Porter: The parents ... I had an interesting story of on several parents, I would take snapshots on my cellphone and I would show the parents. I'd ask them when I went out on the ward afterwards. I said, "Would you like to see how your child looks?" This was before they had a chance to see them because they were still in recovery. They said, "Sure," so I showed them on my phone, the preoperative picture and then I showed them the post-op picture and it was amazing.

Several of these parents looked at the picture and it was like something hit them in the gut. They just kind of ... You could see them gasp and move backwards just a little bit. Then the big smile would break out on their face like they were almost overcome with emotion, so it was a very gratifying first reaction. Unfortunately, I didn't have a lot of interaction with the parents after that point because we were so busy but at least the very first interaction was very, very good.

Katie Johnson: Do you have any follow-up with these families?

Dr. Will Porter: Personally, we don't, because we were there for a week and a lot of these kids went home the next day or two days later. We were told by the Kenyan Doctors who did follow up on these children three months later in these outreach clinics, that quite often the parents by that time were just absolutely overjoyed by the result of the repair of the child's lip or palate, that they were extremely grateful.

One of the Kenyan Doctors who was telling us about that at the farewell banquet said, "You know," he joked. He said, "American Doctors do all of this great work and we get all of the credit," so he was very happy that we were coming to do what we did.

Katie Johnson: You're back home, back at work in your regular practice. Anything that you took back from this mission trip that influences your life or your practice today?

Dr. Will Porter: Every time that I've gone to Kenya I have been impressed at how wonderfully integrated the whole ministry of repairing cleft lips and palates is. I am impressed that, with my gifts and talents and with the gifts and talents all of the ENT Surgeons had, we helped to do something physically that was quite tangible.

We had a little bit of spiritual impact in that we would try to pray with patients before they went to the O.R. Some of them didn't speak very good English, the parents didn't. The main impact we had was physical. We just mended something that needed to be mended. Afterwards, I was very impressed with the nursing staff who took very good care of these kids. I was extremely impressed with the chaplain staff, which daily, would go in the wards and interact with the patient's parents.

They had a tremendous impact because these parents had witnessed a remarkable transformation of their children physically, which opened them up to the message of The Gospel, spiritually. As a result, statistically, every time I've been, I have found that for approximately every 50 children that were operated on, about 15 more or less, people would respond to The Gospel and either make a lifelong commitment of their hearts and their loves to Jesus or they would recommit their lives to him, because they tangibly saw, "Hey, these Doctors are coming in the name of the Lord and they are helping my child and they're helping me because I get to have a restored child and a restored relationship in the village. We're very thankful for this opportunity."

It was fully paid for by other people who had given generously. They really benefited, not just physically, but spiritually. Seeing the boldness of the chaplains and the good work of the Physicians that were my colleagues, I bring this back now and it just helps me to be a little bit more aware that people have not only physical needs that I'm treating in clinic, but some of them just have practical emotional or spiritual needs and I try to be a little more cognizant of being aware of those. I just want to be the very best Doctor that I can and I think that if we do the best that we can on our job, whatever it is, that that brings glory to God.

Katie Johnson: Anything else you'd like to add that I haven't asked you about?

Dr. Will Porter: I am reminded this time of year, it's advent season and I was reminded of an old Christmas carol that everybody's familiar with. You hear it in the department stores playing over the intercoms, Hark the Herald Angels Sing. The fourth verse says, "Hail the flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate deity, pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel."

That sums up the love of God and the fact that he became flesh, was able to minister physically to people, which he healed them. He healed their broken bodies but he also came for a deeper message, which was the message of The Gospel. God made a physical universe and I'm impressed at how wonderful our physical

universe is.

He is pleased with our physical bodies, with our physical universe, that he became part of it and participated in it. That's as important to him, I think, as the spiritual aspect of our souls and our response to him. For some reason, those things really stood out to me during this mission trip.

Katie Johnson: Hark the Hark the Herald Angels Sing, just brings a vision to me of all kinds of children being able to sing and to speak more clearly, thanks to the work of your cleft palate surgical team that visited Kenya.

Thank you for sharing this story with us. Thank you for sharing your gifts across the globe and right here at home at Lake Region Healthcare. We appreciate all that you do.

Dr. Will Porter: Thank you Katie. I appreciate you having me here today.

Katie Johnson: Dr. Will Porter, ENT at Lake Region Healthcare, my guest today on Apple a Day. Both Dr. Porter and I remind you: There is so much to do here, stay healthy for it. Have a great day.