

**2021 M3 Conference**  
**Russ E. White, MD, MPH, FACS, FCS (ECSA)**  
***“What Are You Here For? Motivations in Missions”***

**CLICK LINK TO WATCH SESSION: <https://youtu.be/jbYZwgKWyDE>**

**How should a medical student/doctor prepare for missionary surgery or cardiothoracic care prior to going abroad?**

First and foremost, prepare your heart. Keep the flame of missions alive in your heart by attending things like the M3 Conference and possibly take short-term trips to keep your vision alive in pursuing your long-term goal. To prepare for cardiothoracic work in Africa, you of course need to complete cardiothoracic training. There are a few programs that are beginning to look into overseas options for trainees. The Medical College of Wisconsin in Milwaukee will start sending fellows next year (2022). Their team has many Christians on board and might be a great fit. If you are currently in cardiothoracic training in a country that doesn't have significant cases of Rheumatic Heart Disease, look into the option of going to Tenwek Hospital in Kenya for a month elective. You can learn more about pursuing opportunities at Tenwek Hospital by connecting with World Medical Mission at: <https://www.samaritanspurse.org/medical/world-medical-mission/>

**My daughter is a pediatric cardiologist and I am an internist, do you have any use for us at Tenwek Hospital when we decide to come?**

I would say is the Pope Catholic?! Absolutely, in fact for pediatric cardiologist, we would blaze the trail for you and welcome you with open arms to come to Tenwek. You can help not only in taking care of patients, but in teaching and training our fellows, residents and medical officers, the whole team of those taking care of these patients. So, come on down.

**Do you accept operating room nurses as volunteers to give your nurses some time off?**

We do take nurses—particularly those with special skills such as ICU nurses or nurse anesthetists. Also, nurses with cardiac ICU experience can work with our nursing team to upgrade their skills and provide them with some CMEs.

**How can I serve from my country Honduras? Professionally, I have a master's degree in business administration, but am I able to do any activity that is required.**

I have been finding that the business administration of healthcare facilities is probably the area that needs the most attention. Our hospital has grown tremendously in medicine and education but has lagged behind in growing the business side of it. We need Christian administrators to help as well.

**Can you please talk about how COVID-19 has impacted your practice and what do you see as the greatest needs in Sub-Saharan Africa to prepare for future pandemics?**

COVID initially caused a great deal of confusion. We had to stop elective surgery for a period of time. However, none of our patients are elective—they are all urgent. I had to fight hard to keep our operating room open during that time. But I did it knowing that multiple patients were dying every week waiting on our

surgical list. Sub-Saharan Africa needs to work hard to develop its infrastructure to prepare for future pandemics. This is a complex problem, but I believe that the COVID experience will prepare us better.

### **Do you need anesthesiologists?**

We VERY much need anesthesiologists. We did all our original work in cardiothoracic with only nurse anesthetists. We now have one Kenyan anesthesiologist, but he is overwhelmed with trying to care for our cardiac patients and train our nurse anesthetists at the same time. We would like to begin a program to train CRNA's, but we need at least one more anesthesiologist to do this.

### **Where do you get the nursing staff?**

We have a nursing school on site. We are providing additional training in cardiac nursing (both online and in person) to our team, so that we will be prepared to move to the new cardiac center.

### **Can you contextualize the burden of heart disease right now, especially operative surgical heart disease in Sub-Saharan Africa?**

In the Q&A session before mine, I think Jennifer Osteen was talking a little bit about God's plans and our plans. Heart surgery was never part of my plan for Africa. I did train in it, but I thought I would never use it in Africa because I thought of heart disease as a Western disease, not something that was common in Africa. Little did I know that of the thousands and hundreds of thousands of people suffering, most were primarily suffering from rheumatic heart disease and congenital heart disease. To put this in some context, if you take rheumatic heart disease alone, there are about 35 million people in the world with rheumatic heart disease, the vast majority of those are in Sub-Saharan Africa. That number is essentially equivalent to the number of people living with HIV/AIDS in the world today. With that being said, consider when was the last time you saw a commercial or a fundraising event or even a promotion on the research into rheumatic heart disease...it's really an orphan condition because it's a disease generally of the lower socio-economic classes. People are missing the care they need. I currently have 400 patients on our waiting list for heart surgery, a life-saving surgery that can give them a normal life span. And, every week I have one or two patients die on the waiting list. There are thousands and thousands of people out there waiting for surgery and waiting to be found and treated. Again, this was never my plan, it's something God brought me to step by step. I really believe we can make a major dent in this condition. What better way to change the hearts of the world than to literally and spiritually reach into people's hearts.

### **What is your vision for the cardiothoracic center that is currently being built at Tenwek Hospital?**

Currently at Tenwek, we are limited by many things, finances are certainly one of them, but that's never the biggest problem. We are limited by space. Right now, we are operating out of one operating room because of all the other specialties that also need to keep working at Tenwek. We have this list of 400 rheumatics and about 250 congenital heart patients, most of whom will die. We are limited by our recovery room space, operating room space, and our human resources. So, we started a very ambitious program two years ago to build a new cardiothoracic heart center at Tenwek Hospital, which will have about 170 beds with 6 operating rooms and 36 ICU beds. I firmly believe this will be the premiere cardiothoracic center in Sub-Saharan Africa, and I don't say that out of pride at all. I'm amazed that God is doing this. I say it out of joy that the premiere cardiothoracic center in the region, in all Sub-Saharan Africa, can be a center that is giving glory to God and is bringing healing to people's bodies. The construction of the cardiothoracic center is underway. So far, we've completed



the apartments for the fellows, and they've gladly moved in. We're getting started now on the main hospital itself, and we are waiting to see what God will do in that.

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**The Tenwek Cardiothoracic Center is an ambitious project from a monetary standpoint, correct?**

It's by far the biggest project we've done at Tenwek Hospital. It's the biggest project I've been involved with. It's not something I would've dreamed of years ago, but I really believe it's what God is calling us to do. We need \$20 million dollars to bring this hospital up from the ground. The land was purchased, and the excavation is done. We've built, ourselves, 500,000 cinder blocks to build the hospital. The architects are finished with their work. I know in the Lord's economy it's going to be doable. To me it sounds overwhelming at times... We need 20 million dollars to bring this hospital to fruition.

**If someone wants to serve at Tenwek, what is the process to come and serve?**

Most of our visitors come through World Medical Mission, the medical branch of Samaritan's Purse. World Medical Mission is very well familiar with Tenwek Hospital, and they have been working closely with us on this cardiac project, so they would be happy to put you in touch with the right connections and make the way easy. Learn more about World Medical Mission at: <https://www.samaritanspurse.org/medical/world-medical-mission/>