

NURSING ALUM WHO WORKS ON MEDICAL SHIP ON AFRICAN COAST FEATURED ON '60 MINUTES'



Ali Rae Chandra '05

Nursing

In February, CBS' "60 Minutes" aired a segment about Africa Mercy, the largest civilian hospital ship, which travels along the coast of West Africa to provide medical care to some of the poorest countries on the planet. This floating hospital includes 90 nurses—on of whom is Ali Rae (Wilks) Chandra '05. Since 2008, she has been volunteering full time aboard Africa Mercy through Mercy Ships, an organization that uses hospital ships to bring medical expertise and supplies to areas of the world that need it most.

Mercy Ships has more than 1,200 volunteer career staff and crew from more than 40 nations. These professionals are trained to provide facial reconstructive surgeries, dental care, sight restoration and many other medical services readily available in first-world nations.

In the "60 Minutes" piece, Chandra describes the way in which she provides care to those who are disfigured by tumors, injuries and other physical problems that cause them to be shunned in their communities. "You don't see the tumor. You just see the person's eyes. Or, if they have one eye because the other one is a tumor, you find their eye and you find a way to connect with them."

Life on a floating community of medical staff, cooks, carpenters, children, teachers, pastors and librarians has its challenges. They do not receive a salary. In fact, they pay for the experience of working with Mercy Ships. But the benefits are intangible—and priceless. "We are hundreds of people thousands of miles from home," explains Chandra, "and we are all here so that the hands of a surgeon can quietly sew together the broken pieces of a child's life."

When "60 Minutes" caught up with Africa Mercy, the crew was scheduled to spend five months in Togo, West Africa. When it was time for the ship to leave port, 281 tumors had been removed, 34 cleft palates had been restored and 794 blind patients had regained sight. "At the end of the day, all my nursing skill and medical knowledge I might have pale in comparison to the way God is able to work, both through me and despite me," said Chandra. "I left Messiah with a strong set of skills and an unshakable knowledge that, when medicine isn't enough, God is."

-Adela Antal '16 and Anna Seip