

On a Mission of HOPE

Oakland RN is honored for donating her time and talent to train health care workers around the world.

By Jessie Mangaliman, Regional Media Relations Specialist

As a young student just starting to dream about a career in nursing, Cherri Dobson, RN, remembers reading about the SS Hope, “the big white ship that sailed around the world delivering medical care to poor nations.”



Cherri Dobson, RN, on a recent mission to Southern Belize

That ship was decommissioned decades ago, but Dobson, a staff nurse at the Kaiser Permanente Oakland Medical Center Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, is on the land-based equivalent: a volunteer-run global medical mission, traveling to remote corners of the world, training health care workers about delivering care with limited resources.

[Project HOPE](#), (the acronym stands for Health Opportunities for People Everywhere) an international nonprofit that conducts medical missions as well as health care and education training, honored Dobson recently as a Volunteer of the Year for a long record of service that has taken her to Liberia, Trinidad, Guyana, Vietnam, Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Benin, and Togo.

She recently returned from a mission in Dangriga, a town on the Caribbean Coast in Southern Belize, training local health care providers in obstetrical care.

On the first week of her trip, she followed a rural public health nurse into remote areas to immunize children and conduct well-baby checks.

Another week, she helped present a training course in Advanced Life Support Obstetrics for 30 providers from across Belize to help them deliver evidence-based obstetrical care.

“I got a whole new perspective on charitable giving and how it works after I first got involved,” Dobson wrote in an email from Belize, recalling her first Project HOPE mission to Liberia in 2008. “While providing clinics and disaster services are valuable, they don’t correct the root of the problem: Many nations are poor in available resources and trained personnel.”

With Project HOPE’s focus on sustainability and capacity building, Dobson said, “This is where the most good can be achieved: by training the local professionals how to deliver evidence-based care in settings lacking resources.”

She has taught Neonatal Resuscitation in Liberia, worked in the adult cholera ward in Haiti, taught cardiac assessment in Cameroon, and conducted discharge teaching about blood pressure, diabetes, and other chronic diseases in Togo.

Dobson has been an RN for 30 years, and last month she celebrated her ninth year at KP Oakland’s NICU.

“For me this is nursing at its most basic and fundamental level,” Dobson wrote from Belize. “Sometimes we can get too overcome by all the bells and whistles we have at home, and it’s hard to see the patient. Out here, it’s truly patient-focused, and seeing how much you can accomplish for them with limited resources.”

Last year, 510 Project HOPE volunteers gave more than 41,000 hours of service, said Matt Peterson senior manager for volunteer operations at Project HOPE, based in Millwood, Va. That’s \$2 million worth of service.

“Volunteers like Cherri Dobson take the resources that we have and enhance our programs and provide services we don’t have the staff to do,” said Peterson. “Their work increases the capability and capacity of our organization.”

Dobson volunteered 608 hours last year, receiving the Silver Medal for Volunteer of the Year.

“Cherri is phenomenal,” Peterson said. “She commits her life to doing this work.”

Dobson said she is honored by the recognition from Project HOPE, but pointed out that she’s able to volunteer because of support from her manager, Pamela Middleton, colleagues at the NICU, and Kaiser Permanente’s culture of volunteerism.

“We enjoy hearing about her many adventures abroad on these missions,” said Middleton, NICU manager, “but most of all, Cherri’s work with Project HOPE is an inspiration for all of the nurses here at OMC.”

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