

*A week has flown by both literally and figuratively. This time last week we were 'hanging in the air' somewhere between Paris and Cotonou, Benin. We arrived late in the evening on board the Africa Mercy which is docked in Port du Peche, Cotonou. This is our fourth visit here in 12 years and the country, though still very poor, is very obviously improving economically, with now compulsory education and significant building projects. It seems that there is less corruption here than in nearby Nigeria and Ships are docking here to offload cargo which is then transported by road to Nigeria to circumvent corrupt dock officials there! This has brought obvious benefits to Cotonou, but it has not necessarily spread to the rest of the country. The one passenger train system is no longer working but is apparently about to restart.*



*On the dock with a fishing village in the background*

*Both of us have been fully occupied working in the Operating Rooms. Tony has removed four large jaw tumours (hemimandibulectomies) and replaced them with titanium plates. He has also freed up ankylosed jaw joints in a 9 year old girl and a 30 year old man. Neither of them had been able to open their mouths for several years, but had to force soft food around the backs of their teeth.*



*Looking the other way towards the river and Hotel du Lac in the distance*

*Friday evening produced an unexpected emergency when Tony's patient from Wednesday was found to have been bleeding under his tongue. The pressure had been building up for 48 hours under his bandages and he then started bleeding dramatically from his mouth. After a difficult and lengthy anaesthetic intubation Tony was quickly able to locate the problem to stop the bleeding – a tiny artery that had been nicked when the drain was put in at the end of surgery and had been oozing ever since. Following a wobbly start the patient is now doing well.*



*No, we're not operating on feet*

*Ann is trying to gain new nursing skills working in the Operating Room and keeping out of trouble, well mostly! She has been a circulating nurse this week, which means running around finding things, keeping a record of everything and appeasing the surgeon (ha ha). The OR nurses are a great team.*

*We have managed to take some air and sunshine this weekend, by walking into the town centre and visiting a warehouse set up to house patients recovering and gaining strength before they travel home. This is now an excellent and well thought out 78 bed facility, where the sleeping areas are air-conditioned modules. It even includes schooling for any of the patients or relatives waiting there. A ship's vehicle ferries the patients to and from the ship when they need to attend for wound care and follow up. Here are views of the facility:*



*happy postoperative kids*



*In one of the air-conditioned modules in the "Hospitality Centre" warehouse. Well that's the news for now. The President is apparently throwing a party for the Ship next week to say thanks for what we are doing.*

*With love from a hot climate*

*Ann & Tony*