

TEACH A MAN TO FISH

Alan S. Crandall, MD, uses the power of teaching to improve ophthalmic care in developing nations.



In Guatemala, Dr. Crandall visits with a patient and her family after surgery.



For 20 years, Alan S. Crandall, MD, has followed a proverb: "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime." Dr. Crandall regularly ventures from his home base at the John A. Moran Eye Center in Salt Lake City to provide ophthalmic care and extensive training throughout Ghana, Tanzania, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Kenya, Nepal, India, and China. His inspirational humanitarian work makes him CRST's January 2017 living legend.

How did you become interested in humanitarian work?

I grew up in an environment that emphasized giving back. My father was an ophthalmologist who never refused a patient regardless of race, color, creed, or the ability to pay. I remember patients would pay with meat they had hunted, chickens, fish, and paintings. My mother was a nurse who encouraged us to care for others and let all six of us kids (4 girls and 2 boys) know that we should treat everyone as brothers and sisters.

What trends in ophthalmology do you find to be the most exciting?

I love to see change, new surgical techniques, and novel medications, but I also love the ability and the desire of ophthalmologists to help the world manage curable blindness. Although we belong to a surgical subspecialty, every person will need our skills at some time in his or her life.

Your work in Sudan is difficult and dangerous. What keeps you motivated?

Although South Sudan is dangerous, my colleagues and I have been working with one of the Lost Boys of the South Sudan, a great hero, John Dau, who has sacrificed much to help his country. We also work with emergency physicians from Skaneateles, New York, as part of the team. John makes sure we are safe as can be.

Editor's note: The Lost Boys of Sudan are a group of boys from the Nuer and Dinka ethnic groups who were displaced or orphaned during the Second Sudanese Civil War. Approximately 20,000 to 27,000 boys, between the ages of 7 and 17, travelled by foot to Ethiopia and Kenya. John Dau was 10 years old when he was forced from his village in the dead of night. He led groups of displaced boys across Sudan

for hundreds of miles as they faced starvation, disease, and violence. He now runs the John Dau Foundation to provide health care in South Sudan by building and sustaining medical clinics and training community health workers.

Why is it important to teach ophthalmic skills to local health care providers?

Every systemic disease has an ocular manifestation (eg, diabetes, hypertension, migraines, etc.). Many systemic medicines can cause ocular problems (eg, steroids and urinary medications such as tamsulosin). Central nervous problems such as tumors, Alzheimer disease, and many inherited problems have ocular manifestations as well. Thorough ocular exams can pick up many of these conditions. ■



At the end of a long day in Sudan, a small boy takes Dr. Crandall's hand for the walk home.

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