

# Taking Something Great and Making it Even Better



It may only account for slightly more than two weeks of every year, but what Donald Budenz, M.D., associate professor of ophthalmology, is accomplishing in Ghana, West Africa already is impacting thousands of patients and helping advance ophthalmologic care in the third world region.

Budenz, a glaucoma specialist, is a member of the medical board of the Christian Eye Ministry, a division of International Aid. Through the ministry, ophthalmologists, optometrists and other eye care professionals volunteer two to three weeks of professional time annually to diagnose, treat and forever change the lives of the visually impaired. In addition to seeing patients and performing surgery, Budenz helps train local ophthalmologists to perform surgery. As a rule, these ophthalmologists have had no hands-on surgical training as part of their education. “Teaching is one of the best things we can do,” he says. “Actually performing surgery is just a drop in the bucket compared to the incidence of blindness over there. By training others, we can enable them to carry on our work.”

Currently, there are only 10 – 15 surgical ophthalmologists in Ghana to treat a population of more than 17.2 million people, 70,000 of whom have reversible blindness that could be helped by cataract or glaucoma surgery. “It’s unbelievable to think that when visiting doctors aren’t there doing glaucoma surgery, people are going blind,” he says.

Budenz hopes that the masters in public health degree he currently is pursuing through John Hopkins University will enable him to have an even greater impact on healthcare in more third world and international populations. “I had hit a plateau in terms of the international health work I was equipped to do,” he says. “With this degree, I hope to bring more tools to the table in international health.”

Budenz says it’s the philosophy of Carmen A. Puliafito, professor and chairman of Bascom Palmer, which is so apparent in his public health work. “Dr. Puliafito has been a tremendous role model. He’s a proponent of taking an individual or organization that’s already great and making it even better,” he says. “His philosophy is one we all should adopt. It would certainly be easy at this point to be comfortable with the routine, but I feel there’s a lot more I could be doing.”

Already Budenz accomplishes quite a lot at Bascom Palmer. In addition to his clinical practice, Budenz is associate medical director of the hospital and chairman of its quality assurance committee. He also oversees physician compliance. In his practice, Budenz sees primarily elderly patients with either glaucoma or cataracts. In terms of glaucoma, he works to prevent the disease and its progression. For cataract patients, he aims to restore their vision, allowing them to see again.



Dr. Budenz and a Ghanaian doctor in training operate side-by-side in Cape Coast, Ghana, West Africa.



Budenz became interested in the field of ophthalmology during his first year in medical school at Harvard. There, he had the opportunity to serve as a research assistant in ophthalmology, an experience that got him “totally turned on to the clinical research aspect.” He found great satisfaction in being able to treat people with a variety of maladies, particularly those related to vision—something he says he has always found fascinating.

Though Budenz completed a fellowship in glaucoma at Bascom Palmer, he did not join the facility as a faculty member for two years. Initially he joined the faculty of the Scheie Eye Institute at the University of Pennsylvania

**“Teaching is one of the best things we can do. The number of surgeries performed is just a drop in the bucket compared to the incidence of blindness over there. By training others, we can enable them to carry on our work.”**

—Donald Budenz, M.D.

where he completed his residency. “But I had let Dr. Paul Palmberg (Bascom Palmer professor of ophthalmology) know I wanted to come back when a position became available,” he says. “I couldn’t think of any place better to work than here.”

Today he knows it was the right decision. Budenz has grown professionally and personally at Bascom Palmer. Outside of work, Budenz faces a typical challenge—trying to make the most of his time with his three children, ages 10, 12 and 14, and his wife, Sue. When he’s not sailing, horseback riding or playing sports with one of the children, Budenz likes to read fiction.