Healing Respite
By Jeanne Dillner, SIGN CEO

People often ask me which country is my favorite. Every country has its unique beauty. I am impressed with all of the people we meet in every hospital and country we visit, so I cannot choose a favorite. But I can say that Nkoaranga Lutheran Hospital in Arusha, Tanzania, is the most peaceful hospital we visit. It is a respite for patients, medical staff, and visitors like Dr. Zirkle and me.

Our daily routine involved walking into the building that houses the two operating rooms. We passed patients sitting on wooden benches outside of the operating theatre. They quietly chatted with each other as they waited to be seen by Dr. Sam Kiwesa. He has the dual responsibility of managing the hospital as well as being the only orthopaedic surgeon.

Each day Dr. Kiwesa and Dr. Zirkle sat together to discuss the plan for surgeries they would perform. Dr. Kiwesa has built up a team of medical professionals who serve as anesthesiologists, scrub nurses, circulating nurses, and surgical techs. They work as a unified team to serve hundreds of patients that need surgery each month. Their professional countenance contributes to the sense of serenity in the OR.

In between the surgical cases, Dr. Kiwesa saw patients and tended to hospital business. Patients came in with all kinds of orthopaedic problems including back pain, knee pain, elbow dislocations, and follow-up for SIGN Surgery. Dr. Kiwesa now has a computer inside the room that serves as his office and the break room for the surgical staff. The hospital recently moved to digital x-ray, which has made recording the cases and follow-up onto the surgical database much easier. (continued on back page)
Prior to digital x-ray, Dr. Kiwesa had to take a photo of the pre-op, post-op, and follow-up x-rays and transfer the photos onto a computer and then enter the data and images into the SIGN Surgical Database. These steps are reduced with digital x-ray. For every SIGN Patient, he accesses the database to view their case, enters the clinical follow-up information, and pulls in the digital x-rays. The computer work now takes just two minutes, giving him ample time to listen to each patient describe their level and location of pain and to provide them with advice, prescriptions, and, at times, exercises.

Dr. Kiwesa’s reputation as a SIGN Surgeon has drawn patients from the entire region. Frequently the fracture cases have to compete with the general surgical and OB-GYN needs. Thanks to Feuerkinder, a German NGO that has worked with Dr. Kiwesa for many years, construction of four new operating theatres is scheduled to be completed by December. This will further expand the hospital’s capacity to care for the injured poor.

Another blessing of visiting Nkoaranga Lutheran Hospital is that we were in the vicinity of the boarding school that my friend Martha attends. She and I became friends when she was brought into Muhimbili Orthopaedic Institute in 2011 for a femur fracture. She recovered well and is thriving in school.

I am grateful to Dr. Kiwesa, his wife Villa, and their two sons for giving her a home during her school breaks. We visited their home and spoke with Martha about her current dream of being a doctor. Thanks to the Kiwesa’s support, Martha’s future is bright. We hope one day to see her and Dr. Kiwesa working together to serve the injured poor.

Martha (front left) has been welcomed into the Kiwesa family. As an orphan, she enjoys the support of the family setting.