



CASE STUDY: Collaborating to Advance Healthcare in Africa



The [MSD Fellowship for Global Health](#) is a three-month, field-based corporate pro bono program designed to leverage the skills and talents of our employees. Launched in 2012, it pairs the best minds from the company with nonprofit partner organizations around the world to provide meaningful and systematic improvements in health service delivery for people in the greatest need.

RTC Fellows: The Richard T. Clark (RTC) Fellows assigned to BVGH were Nicole Buist, principal scientist, Preclinical Development, and Katherine Young, senior principal scientist, Biology-Discovery in 2014, followed in 2015 by Ellen Minnihan, senior scientist, Preclinical Development and Lihu Yang, principal scientist, Chemistry.

Nonprofit: [BIO Ventures for Global Health \(BVGH\)](#) is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to engage the private sector in global health initiatives. BVGH creates programs and establishes partnerships that leverage the knowledge, experience and resources of industry to address the unmet medical needs of the developing world. It works at the crossroads of the biopharmaceutical industry and global health to find the common ground between the aspirations of the global health community and the strategic priorities of companies.

Opportunity: BVGH engages individuals and organizations from countries across the globe to establish collaborations that accelerate product development for diseases of poverty and to build biomedical research capacity in sub-Saharan Africa.

The RTC Fellows conducted an analysis of research institutions in Cameroon, Kenya, Ghana and Tunisia to determine research interests, capabilities, needs and, ultimately, to identify BVGH program and partnership opportunities. Although the Fellows have strong science and drug development backgrounds, they all acknowledged that their interpersonal skills were crucial for success. Together, they were able to build trust by meeting with scientists in their own research facilities. This enabled key stakeholders to be candid in expressing their needs and concerns.

Impact: Much of the Fellows' work revolved around identifying issues and facilitating the dissemination of scientific knowledge through lab- and classroom-based training, seminars, one-on-one discussions and follow-up teleconferences. In just 90 days each, these teams contributed significantly to the healthcare landscape and its continued improvement. Here's how:

- In 2014, Katherine and Nicole had identified a need for state-of-the-art lab equipment in the region. To this end, high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) equipment, which is used to evaluate and purify mixtures, was donated to outfit a chemistry lab in Cameroon. In 2015, Ellen and Lihu worked with BVGH to set up the equipment and train local researchers in Cameroon not only to use it, but also to empower them with a long-term sustainability plan.
- BVGH is exceeding its goals to build partnerships that focus on neglected tropical disease research and development thanks, in part, to the contributions of the RTC Fellows. The Fellows were able to analyze, understand and report the challenges researchers are facing, enabling BVGH to target partners who have specific knowledge, assets or funding that will allow them to continue their research. In fact, as a result of the Fellows' collaborations, the research facility in Ghana that Katherine and Nicole visited joined WIPO Re:Search – a consortium managed by BVGH in partnership with the World Intellectual Property Organization. The Ghanaian research institute has since entered into a collaboration with another WIPO Re:Search Member – the University of Washington Bothell – to study differences in drug metabolism between Caucasian and African populations.

"We couldn't be more pleased with the accomplishments of the RTC Fellows," said Katy Graef, Senior Manager, BVGH. "These Fellows have so much knowledge that they can directly impart on scientists all over the world. Their ability to gather and sift through information and use their scientific capabilities to make recommendations for BVGH's long-term strategy is priceless."

While the impact that these RTC Fellows made during their secondment was meaningful, the effect the experience had on the Fellows themselves was equally life-changing. These Fellows not only gained a unique perspective on health systems in other parts of the world, but they also tested their leadership skills and ability to adapt to foreign environments. Now, they bring these real-life learnings to bear on their daily work to drive the company's mission to help the world be well.

2014



2015



Katherine and Nicole meet with University of Buea Vice Chancellor Nalova Lyonga, Dr. Obenju, Vice Dean for Research and Collaboration, and Dr. Fidelis Cho-Ngwa, head of the [ANDI Centre of Excellence for Onchocerciasis Drug Research](#)



Lihu and Ellen celebrate after repairing a leaking solvent pump on the donated HPLC instrument in the Biotechnology Unit of the University of Buea.

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