

## Patient Navigation in Nigeria

What if you were asked to assist with navigation in a different country? Last fall I received an email that truly changed my life and I would like to share my story. One morning as I was going through emails and there was one that caught my attention---“Would you be interested in travelling to Nigeria?” Of course I replied yes and before I knew it I was in contact with Runcie Chidebe-founder of Project Pink Blue planning my 2 week visit to Nigeria that would change my life in so many ways. Project Pink Blue is a cancer nonprofit engaged in raising cancer awareness, patient navigation, advocacy and free breast and cervical screening for women living in poverty. This organization launched Nigeria’s first patient navigation program and a toll-free telephone center 0800CANCER in 2016. They have impacted over a million people in Africa through radio, television and social media promoting early detection and raising cancer awareness. In November 2016, Project Pink Blue was hosting The Breast Cancer Navigation & Palliative Program and they asked if I could present lectures on patient navigation and do an in-depth training course to 40 nurses and midwives who had been chosen by Project Pink Blue to represent their territory. I was contacted by the US Embassy that I had received the Fulbright Scholarship and that I would be travelling as a representative of the US Embassy and within the next few weeks I was packing my suitcase and headed to Nigeria all by myself!!

Pinching myself that this was happening I was greeted by the most enthusiastic and energetic group of young people I had ever met. Runcie and his team of nurses, social workers and volunteers are set on a mission-to educate the people of Nigeria to breast cancer awareness and detection. The first week was a whirlwind of meetings and introductions with elected officials, professors, hospital administrators, physicians, nurses, and even tribal chiefs to explain how patient navigation can help to save lives and can truly impact many!! We had a meeting at the House of Parliament with the Hon. Muhammed Usman who is the Deputy Chair for Health Services who also had lost a family member to cancer and truly felt the importance of education everyone. Project Pink Blue has now been invited to speak at the House of Parliament and will be mandating for more government assistance. A few days we were invited to different hospitals to provide information regarding navigation and the impact it has on a community.

The second week we did a five day training course to nurses and social workers. They had a variety of physicians—medical oncologists, radiation oncologists, palliative care physicians as well as spiritual leaders from both the Christian and the Muslim faith all contribute their expertise as to how we can all provide the most passionate care to our patients. Throughout the training, the role of the navigator was paramount in assisting the patient and the family through this difficult journey. I knew that Nigeria would be different in so many ways but one thing for certain is that patients are often lost, confused and feel helpless no matter what country they live in once they are told they have cancer. To have a navigator guide and educate, provide emotional support, coordinate appointments, decrease barriers in care are issues that transcend all borders. This November I will have the opportunity to have Runcie Chidebe tour Dallas and meet the wonderful Sarah Cannon Navigators that I have the privilege of working with on a daily

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basis. I will forever be grateful to my new friends in Nigeria for showing me the passion and enthusiasm they use every day in the fight toward cancer.

## Highlights from Laurie's time in Africa



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*Laurie Tauriainen, BSN, RN is a Breast Cancer Nurse Navigator at Sarah Cannon Cancer Institute at Medical City Healthcare. She covers several hospitals: Medical City Frisco, Las Colinas, McKinney & Plano.*