

Monrovia Medical Unit Takes the Corps Mission to West Africa

On November 12, 2014, Physician Assistant Alvin Davis became the first Ebola confirmed patient to enter the Monrovia Medical Unit (MMU) and on November 27, 2014, he walked out Ebola free.



Photographed by LT M. R. Muni- Alvin arrives to the open arms and tender care of the USPHS at the MMU

Authored by LT Michael R. Muni, PIO MMU

Alvin, a 28 year old physician assistant working at the Goodwill Health Clinic in Monrovia, Liberia for the past 3 years arrived at the MMU on November 12, 2014, becoming the first patient to step foot in the newly finished MMU. The MMU's mission is to provide hope through care to health care workers in Liberia who may have the Ebola virus disease and continuing efforts with the Liberian and international partners to build capacity for additional care. The MMU is a 25-bed Ebola Treatment Unit specifically designed to treat infected health care workers such as doctors and nurses who are at higher risk of infection, because they are in close, sustained contact with Ebola patients who are symptomatic and infectious. Since opening its doors in the beginning of November 2014, the MMU has received and provided care for numerous health care workers.



Photographed by LT M. Holshue- The USPHS MMU, located in Harbel, Grand Bassa, Liberia

Alvin believes the onset of Ebola brought improved preventive measures in the workplace and surrounding communities. The staff at the Goodwill Health Clinic washed their hands but the absence of personal protective equipment (PPE) was an issue that delayed the further advancement of preventive measures. Alvin was encouraged by signs of improvement when PPE was provided but supplies were limited to one set per staff member, which they took home each night to wash and reuse every day. When I asked Alvin if he had any ideas on how he contracted the Ebola virus disease his smile instantly vanished and without hesitation he said, "I know how I got Ebola." Alvin explained how while at work one day wearing his used PPE he was giving a physical examination to a male patient, who would later be confirmed for Ebola and eventually lose his battle against Ebola. Upon hearing the news of this patient's death, on November 2, 2014, Alvin made the personal and professional decision to stay home and self-monitor.

On November 6, 2014, Alvin woke up experiencing a fever and by 7:00pm when the fever had not subsided Alvin decided to get a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test. Several hours passed before Alvin had the results that he was in fact confirmed for the Ebola virus disease. He immediately went to an Ebola Treatment Unit (ETU) in Monrovia, Liberia, where he waited for the results of an additional PCR test in a tent for suspected Ebola patients. Upon receiving the second positive test result Alvin said, "I felt like my whole world was turned upside down." With an immediate concern for his 3 year old son, Alvin spent little time deciding to leave the ETU when advised he could go to an American ETU made specifically for health care workers. Alvin said, "I thought the American ETU would be up to standards because America is a unique country." Alvin's memory of arriving at the MMU was still vivid as he described a clean facility with resources proving an advanced level of treatment and a team of providers that truly cared about his well-being. Describing his fight against Ebola Alvin said, "At first I thought about how the chance of surviving Ebola was slim but as I witnessed loving and tenderly care for others here it was an inspiration to lift me up and try hard to beat the fatigue."

Alvin described his first week fighting Ebola at the MMU as a struggle both physically and mentally but the providers were there for me every step of the way. Commander (CDR) Jenny Mohon, USPHS Commissioned Corps MMU Team 1 nurse, still tears up when talking about helping Alvin walk to the visiting area to see his parents but only making it a few steps before asking CDR Mohon to pray with him for the strength to keep walking. His aunt, stepfather, and mother drove from New Georgia, Liberia every two days while Alvin was at the MMU even though the trip took well over an hour each way. Mary, his mother, stated Alvin would struggle even with assistance when walking to the visiting area at first but over time he needed less help. By the start of the second week Alvin discussed feeling better and getting some strength back. Alvin talked about how he could tell the providers at the MMU truly cared because they not only asked about him but they asked about his family too. Mary said, "every time I came up here to the hospital he looked stronger and told me he was feeling better."

The night after receiving his first PCR negative result Alvin talked about how he felt so alone in that hospital room. Alvin talked about Paul Garny, who is a USPHS Commissioned Corps MMU Team 1 nurse, checking on him that night and agreeing to pray with upon Alvin's request. Alvin recalls Paul telling him, "Be strong, God's watching over you."



Photographed by LT M. R. Muni- Alvin and his family giving the glory to God at the MMU

When asked about receiving the second PCR negative result confirming he was free of the Ebola virus disease, Alvin said he was excited to be out of that room finally but a little sad because he would be leaving a place where he met so many good friends. Alvin was not the MMU's first or second patient discharged Ebola virus free but he was our first patient and became our Thanksgiving Day blessing. Though it was emotional to see Alvin leave on November 27, 2014, we didn't realize we would see him again at the MMU.



Photographed by LT M. R. Muni- Alvin grips his discharge paper with pride at the MMU

On December 9, 2014, Alvin returned to the MMU looking stronger than we had ever seen him and wearing that trademark smile the MMU hadn't seen since Thanksgiving Day. After receiving the typical Hollywood movie star attention by posing for photographs with USPHS Commissioned Corps officers aware of his arrival, Alvin agreed to sit down with me and share his story.



Photographed by LCDR P. Nordstrom- Ebola survivor, Alvin (Physician Assistant), returns to MMU

We talked about his family going through some difficult times, but graduating top in his class afforded him the opportunity to follow his passion for nursing. He told me about his dream of always wanting to help others and pursuing a career as a doctor. Alvin made it clear that his goal moving forward is to pursue a master of public health degree in Monrovia so he can become a public health professional in rural areas. He talked about wanting to give back to his hometown rural community located in Bong County, Liberia, which lacks a centralized public health system.

“I want to continue to help stop the outbreak because it is crippling our public health system. I have strong convictions that Ebola will be eradicated,” Alvin stated while discussing the Ebola outbreak in Liberia. When asked what the biggest challenge will be moving forward Alvin said, “The stigma in society about Ebola is our biggest challenge, but I will work hard to break down that stigma by helping others.” When I asked Alvin why he wanted to return to his hometown community after being in Monrovia and seeing all this opportunity to help others, his response to me said so much by saying so little, “Your root, is your root.”