

HEALTH

Woman’s mission is to spread wealth of knowledge



Courtesy of Valerie Walker

MEDICAL DIPLOMACY—Valerie Walker, right, delivers books in 2012 to Sister Aklesia Memorial Hospital in Ethiopia.

By Allison Montroy
allison@theacorn.com

A pioneer in the use of lasers to treat cataracts, ophthalmologist and UCLA professor Dr. Patricia Bath left behind a storied medical legacy when she died in 2019 at age 76.

She also left behind a trove of medical reference books.

Her daughter, Dr. Eraka Bath, an associate professor of psychiatry and biobehavioral sciences at UCLA’s David Geffen School of Medicine, wanted to find a new home for the collection but discovered that most organizations had little interest.

Then she learned about Global Medical Libraries, an organization dedicated to improving healthcare around the world by coordinating the donation of medical textbooks to hospitals and universities in developing nations.

The program’s mission to improve health equity resonated with Bath, who serves as the vice chair of equity, diversity and inclusion for her department, and she happily donated her mom’s collection of textbooks to Global Medical. Soon after, the books were in the hands of medical professionals and students in Ethiopia, Angola and Haiti.

Camarillo resident Valerie Walker, Global Medical Libraries founder, believes that books are the key to shrinking the educational gap. To her, running GML is not only fun and gratifying, it’s her divine calling.

But it’s one she found almost entirely by accident.

In April 2007, when she was director of the UCLA Medical Alumni Association, Walker received an email from a U.S. Army major and UCLA alum who was deployed as a public health officer in Iraq. He was requesting medical textbooks that could be distributed to Iraqi students and doctors.

“They were just asking for a few books so they could do their job better because part of their job as physicians was to train local physicians and they had no current books,” Walker said.

“And it was originally going to be a one-and-done—that’s what I promised my boss.”

Walker called the drive Books Without Borders. When the shipment landed in Iraq, word spread to other nearby U.S. medical military officers—and they wanted in.

Fourteen years and several name changes later, the project is still going strong. Called Global Medical Libraries since 2017, it has helped send over \$2.5 million worth of health science textbooks to 33 countries across the globe. Those numbers continue to grow.

“It’s something I really do believe in—that we can really improve global healthcare one book at a time,” said Walker, 63. “I’ve seen it because I’ve been to other countries and I’ve seen how blessed we are to live (here).”

Walker has visited medical professionals and students around the world who are using the donated textbooks.

In 2012, she made the trip to Sister Aklesia Memorial Hospital, a 75-bed hospital in Adama, Ethiopia.

“I brought them some books . . . and I got out of the van and every single nurse, doctor and administrator was on the front steps to welcome me,” she said. “It was so humbling. . . . Sister Aklesia is a very special place to me.”

In 2015, Walker traveled to Congo, where she visited with Don Brown, a site coordinator who had been helping GML deliver textbooks to University Christian International in Kinshasa.

“I’d inventory them, and (the school’s chancellor) would pick the books up from my house,” said Brown, 63. “He’d pull up and he’s got like half a dozen students in his car and they couldn’t wait to get their hands on them. It’s exciting to be able to provide that information to help them so they can help their own citizens. It made me feel good every time.”

Brown called Walker’s mission “wonderful.”

“She’s like the most awe-

some, giving, heartfelt person I think that I’ve ever met,” he said. “She truly wants to help people and make a difference in people’s lives, and she just does it because her heart tells her this is the right thing to do.”

Walker is the sole figure behind GML. Not only does she absorb the program’s administrative costs, she donates her time to coordinate partnerships so that donors only have to pay domestic shipping.

The University of Tennessee, for instance, is covering overseas shipping costs for donations to the University of Jeremie in Haiti and colleges of veterinary medicine in Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Ethiopia.

The rest of the program’s success relies solely on the generosity of donors, who must ship the books using instructions on the GML website.

“It’s remarkable how this vision . . . wills people to action, because it requires them to box up books, it requires them to fill out forms, and then go to the post office, and then pay for it,” Walker said. “So there’s a level

of belief, right, that these books are going to make a difference. And they do.”

Walker is always touched to hear from those looking to donate books from medical libraries of loved ones who have died.

“That in their grief they’re able to think of others, I just, I’m so impressed by that,” she said.

Bath said making the donation to GML has extended her mother’s legacy.

Not only did her mom make

a huge impact on health and society when she was alive, but that impact continues to be felt across the globe now that she’s gone, Bath said.

“I felt like education was very liberatory for my mom and family, and books really hold the key to that,” she said. “To whatever extent, it’s part of giving back. I felt like it was important to do.”

To learn more about where to donate books, go online to globalmedicallibraries.org.

COASTAL ALLERGY CARE
Caring Accessible Excellence

- Lunchtime & Evening Appointments available
- Spanish speaking

Board Certified Adult & Pediatric Allergist

Dr. Christine Lee-Kim, Dr. Lewis Kanter, Dr. Cristina Porch-Curren, Melissa Howie, PAC

We offer Telemedicine

Allergy, Asthma & Food Allergy

Immune Deficiency • Sinus Problems • Rashes • Drug Allergy

Thousand Oaks
805-493-1537

Camarillo
805-482-8989

Simi Valley
805-581-6482

www.LoveMyAllergist.com

18C20S

Get A
Flu Shot.
Take A
Covid
Test.

Be A Super-Spreader
Of Hope.

Exer
URGENT CARE

Wait where you want. Join the virtual line.
ExerVirtualLine.com

No appointment necessary

Open 7 days a week from 9am to 9pm*
(Last patient registered at 8:30pm) *Excludes Playa Vista

ExerUrgentCare.com

04ATC34C