For more than 20 years, the American Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery Foundation has had a Humanitarian Efforts Committee, which acts as a clearinghouse for Academy members to take part in overseas medical missions. Under the leadership of James E. Saunders, MD, the committee chair and Merry Sebelik, MD, vice-chair, the committee has many working groups including clinically focused groups: otology and ear disease, plastic reconstructive surgery (such as microtia and cleft-lip and palate repair), head and neck cancer (including thyroid), and pediatric. Other groups include residency advocacy, emergency and disaster response and telemedicine, and research / best practices / ethics.

The Humanitarian Opportunities database offers connections to 64 nonprofit organizations working on seven major regions. Because of proximity, many teams go to Central and Andean America and the Caribbean. Most missions last a week to ten days, but two Academy members are long term volunteers, Dr James Murphy, in Tamale, Northern Ghana, and Dr Thomas Boeve in Kenya.

In the last ten years, the Foundation has donated 115 grants of $1,000 each to residents for overseas missions to more than 50 countries. At the annual meeting each autumn, an outstanding volunteer is honoured with the Distinguished Award for Humanitarian Efforts. The 2010 awardee was Dr Peter Roland for his cochlear implant work in Central America.

Also at the annual meeting, committee members staff a Humanitarian Booth, and present Instruction Courses on the nuts and bolts of going on medical missions. The committee organises a two-hour Humanitarian Forum where recent returnees give five-minute vignettes of their experiences. Residents can attend a Humanitarian Roundtable at the Section on Residents and Fellows Assembly.

For those who cannot get away from their practices, there are many ways to help through donating educational materials such as textbooks, journals, CDs and DVDs; medical equipment, instruments, and supplies; journal subscriptions, and, of course, charitable donations for the resident travel grants and International Visiting Scholars.

To learn more about AAO-HNSF Humanitarian Efforts, volunteer for a mission, or apply for a grant, visit our website www.entnet.org/Community/public/Becoming-involved.cfm or email humanitarian@entnet.org