

TRADE & TECHNOLOGY PUTS BETTER HEALTHCARE AT DOOR OF WEST AFRICA

by Curt Cultice
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West Africans will soon have the comfort of knowing they won't have to travel thousands of miles to benefit from the latest in medical diagnosis technology—a new CT Scanner will be arriving soon at the medical center at Polyclinique Internationale Sainte-Anne-Marie Hospital in Abidjan, Cote d' Ivoire.

The CT Scanner, which scans the human body and provides high-resolution images that would not normally be detectable through x-rays, is the first to be located within the seven-country region of West Africa.

“This is a ‘win-win’ for West Africa and our goal of increasing public access to quality health care in this part of the world,” says Don Williams, President of Princeton Health Care. The Atlanta-based firm is a partner in the effort that won the \$1.5 million contract to supply the CT Scanner. The hospital is a privately owned 400-bed facility.

Health Management Resources, Inc., (HMR), a minority-owned management and consulting firm located in Landover, Maryland, lead the partnership. Rounding out the team is the U.S. Export-Import Bank.

“By providing this new technology in this region, people with life-threatening diseases will no longer have to travel to Europe and North America to access top quality clinical diagnosis and medical care,” says Rudolph A. Coleman, President and CEO of HMR. “This program combined with several other initiatives currently under development will make a positive difference in improving the overall health care delivery system in West Africa.”

Given the distance between Europe and West Africa, the savings in time and money is critical for giving West

Africans early treatment of potential health problems.

The CT Scanner will assist medical personnel in deciding if patients will require general surgery, or cardiovascular and pulmonary procedures. It will also bring recognition to the hospital as a major medical center and generate much-needed revenue for the facility.

The CT Scanner is expected to be operational later this spring, and will service 10 to 15 patients daily. That's thousands of patients each year at a cost of about US\$700-\$1,500 per person. The partnership will work closely with the manufacturer and hospital staff to ensure proper training in the use of the CT Scanner.

Williams said he is proud to be a part of the effort to help improve health care in West Africa, but knew it wouldn't be easy to win the contract, which he heard about through a personal contact.

Looking to increase the chances of submitting a winning proposal, Williams says the partnership consulted closely with a commercial officer at the U.S. Department of Commerce's Commercial Service office in Cote d' Ivoire.

“We provided the partnership with a roadmap that enabled them to be even more savvy on the political, economic and market aspects of doing business in



Photo courtesy of Princeton Healthcare, Inc.

Don Lloyd Williams, President & CEO of Princeton Healthcare, Inc., and President/Director Djibo and Deputy Director Ahamel, at the Polyclinique Sainte-Anne-Marie Hospital in Abidjan.

the region,” says Johnny Brown, Regional Senior Commercial Officer for West and Central Africa. “We want our clients to be as prepared as possible so that they can compete on a level playing field with their international competitors here in West Africa.”

“The competition for this project was very intense, and we faced stiff competition from a dozen European firms, including the French,” Williams says. “We brought a strong package to the table that included a quality product and strong service support.”

For several months, the Coleman/Williams team waited for the answer. Finally, the decision: Their partnership had won the contract!

In addition to tapping the Commercial Service, Williams says a key factor in winning the contract was obtaining medium-term insurance from the Export-Import Bank. It was the first time any of the three partners has used such insurance in a business transaction.

“The insurance policy provided by the Export-Import Bank was absolutely critical in securing this contract,” he says. “It really gave our group a lot of leverage in the bidding.”

The Export-Import Bank’s export credit insurance helps credit-worthy foreign buyers purchase U.S. goods. And, it ensures that the U.S. firm making the sale will receive payment should the foreign buyer not fulfill terms of the contract.

“We give a lot of credit to the U.S. Department of Commerce’s Export Assistance Centers in Atlanta and Baltimore,” Williams says. “We used their export counseling services previously and were aware of Ex-Im Bank’s credit insurance program.”

As it turns out, Williams is not the only partner on the winning Cote d’Ivoire CT Scanner team to have previous experience in utilizing Commerce Department services.



Photo courtesy of Princeton Healthcare, Inc.

The CT Scanner provides high resolution images that would not normally be detectable through an x-ray.

Just ask Phyllis Shearer Jones, President and CEO of Elan International, a consulting firm working with HMR—who introduced her client to the Commerce Department’s full range of export assistance programs and services. Since last year, the firm has utilized trade leads, detailed country-specific market information, international company profiles and procurement information from the multilateral development banks.

“This recent deal in Cote d’Ivoire is another excellent example of how successful public-private partnerships can assist developing countries,” says Jones. “Any company looking to export their products or services should consult with the team at the U.S. Export Assistance Centers. They have been extremely responsive and have provided us with first-class service.”

It seems HMR and its partners—present and future—haven’t yet seen the last of the Commerce Department’s export promotion specialists.

“Our goal is to improve the quality of health care by providing new health technology to Africa,” says HMR

founder Coleman. “We plan to pursue additional health initiatives in the region such as education and training programs in HIV/AIDS awareness.”

As it was in Cote d’Ivoire, public-private sector cooperation holds the key to the firm’s future success.

“We look forward to working with our African and American partners,” says Coleman, “we expect to be knocking on the door of the Commerce Department once again.” ■

For more information about the Export-Import Bank’s programs and services, call 800-565-EXIM or visit their website at www.exim.gov.

Contact information for the U.S. & Foreign Commercial Service can be found at www.usatrade.gov. Telephone numbers for the U.S. Department of Commerce’s Export Assistance Centers are located on the back cover of Export America.