With its goal of supplying all of the approximately 77,000 operating rooms in the developing world with pulse oximeters, the Lifebox project is still in its infancy. But with efforts such as those recently taken by the Alabama State Society of Anesthesiologists (ASSA), that goal is getting closer to becoming reality – one country at a time.

The ASSA has teamed with the Alabama Association of Nurse Anesthetists (ALANA) to “adopt” the country of Ecuador through the Lifebox initiative and work to supply that country’s estimated 180 hospitals with 350 pulse oximeters.

The genesis of the Lifebox project occurred at the 2004 World Congress of Anaesthesiologists, with its official launch taking place in 2007, after receiving support from such organizations as the Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland, General Electric Healthcare, and the World Health Organization, among others. Through recommendations of the Committee on Global Humanitarian Outreach, the ASA approved an initiative to support Lifebox at its 2011 Annual Meeting.

Utilizing several close ties and contacts in the country, ASSA Past President (and project coordinator) Peter C. Loux, M.D. and several colleagues from ASSA are currently working to determine the location of each operating room in Ecuador in need of a pulse oximeter.

Lifebox pulse oximeters will be purchased through fundraising efforts by ASSA and ALANA. The two groups will then work with Lifebox to bring together local anesthesia providers, non-governmental organizations and in-country anesthesiologist volunteers to provide training in the use of the devices and follow-up after their implementation.
Way for Lifebox Participation

The cost of each Lifebox unit is $250 and includes a user’s manual, a hypoxia management plan, tutorials, training video, a virtual pulse oximeter, and clinical scenarios.

The Lifebox initiative is working toward a goal of providing 12,000 oximeters worldwide by 2013. For its part, ASSA/ALANA hopes to make an impact both pragmatically and perhaps through inspiration.

“This is a project we can complete within a five-year period,” said Dr. Loux. “We have the leadership. We want to motivate toward an even larger goal of fostering participation not just at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, but the entire anesthesia community in Alabama so we can be a competitive catalyst for the country. Imagine having CRNAs, surgeons and anesthesiologists all working together on this project!”

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ASA Director for Alabama, Jeffrey S. Plagenhoef, M.D., says his group at Anesthesia Consultants Medical Group in Dothan is at 100 percent participation, and he’s seeking similar participation from other departments overall.

ASSA member Gwendolyn Boyd, M.D., who adopted her oldest daughter from Ecuador and has since participated in many medical missions there, hopes that ASA members will view participation in Lifebox as a simple and affordable way to make a significant impact toward patient safety the world over.

“What we’re doing in Alabama should be just the tip of the iceberg as far as Lifebox participation,” she said. “As anesthesiologists, we are responsible for guiding clinical care during surgery, and the pulse oximeter has become one of our most important tools. The fact that so many practitioners in developing countries lack this standard piece of equipment is unacceptable. We have the power to solve this problem – and there is no one better or more appropriate than anesthesiologists working together with anesthetists to accomplish the goal!”

For further information on donating or participating in the Lifebox initiative, please visit http://www.lifebox.org.