



Life onboard...



Life onboard the world's largest charity-run hospital ship is good and busy so far. There are four others who can help cover the duty plumber role in the evenings and overnight onboard, but someone must be on call 24 hours a day, which I'm doing my best to cover (I am the only lead and qualified plumber onboard, which does seem crazy as there are five electricians!)

As the plumber onboard my role takes me all over the ship. I look after the 192 vacuum toilets and showers in cabins/common areas and in the hospital; the vacuum pipes feeding the grey and black water tanks in the engine room (a break down in vacuum system might prevent whole sections of the ship from working); a galley full of washers and sinks; water filters to keep changed at drinking stations around the ship. I am also responsible for the crew and hospital laundry rooms with 15 washing machines and dryers between them being used constantly.

There are also the constant running repairs and problems that needing attention and more long term upgrading and maintenance projects to carry out in between calls. If there's a leak you have get running because we can't risk sinking from the inside out! Fresh water is a precious and limited commodity onboard. This also means two minute ship showers and being careful to turn off taps as often as possible in between washing your hands and even brushing your teeth!

We carry a fairly large amount of spare parts, but it's always a job to source the correct part between the various stores and cargo holds onboard the ship. Often a healthy amount of improvisation is needed to get by, like making your own washers when needed down in the engine room machine shop, converting pipe sizes from steel to plastic, stripping down vacuum toilet and shower brains to make them work again and trying to make sure drains have the correct fall to drain properly - level doesn't always mean level on a ship and we can't just pop down the road the local plumbers merchants.



A floating town is what we have here, so there's always an ingenious way to keep a machine running!

So, as the only plumber there's a lot of maintenance that needs to happen as we keep this amazing hospital ship in good working order, whether in dock or at sea, which is where I'm writing this from - the Atlantic Ocean somewhere between Guinea and Las Palmas. Trying to stay upright for the simplest tasks is often a challenge when the ship starts to roll!

Looking forward to the dry dock period we have in Las Palmas and being able to work alongside teams and get stuck into upgrading projects and the maintenance issues that are not possible with the full 450 strong crew onboard.

A huge thank you to the Plumbers Livery and Dr Keith from the UK for helping with this urgent request for a Plumber. We are incredibly grateful and can't thank you enough for your generosity.

