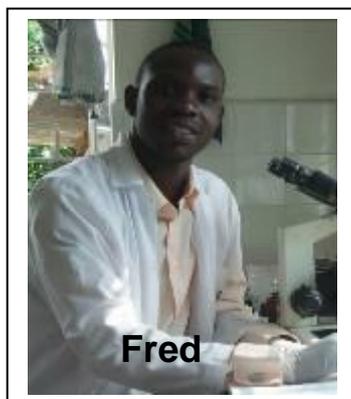


UGANDAN CHRISTMAS CHRONICLES 2008

Dear all

The latest keen medical student, Kathryn Sandford, from the fruitful Pontypridd –Mbale links, came for a 5 week elective on 29th August. We remained in Kampala over the weekend and then attended the Palliative Care Association of Uganda's biannual conference from 1st to 3rd September. Kathryn managed a little sightseeing including the Kasubi tombs and artefacts of four of the previous kings of Buganda. There was also a trip to Entebbe Botanical Gardens, although that was en route to collect her luggage that Emirates had misplaced the previous day. Kathryn and I eventually reached Mbale on 7th after three nights on Lingira Island in Lake Victoria. This was reached by a 90 minute journey in a local, open boat from Jinja. The trip was not primarily for leisure as I was inspecting a half built Deliverance Church clinic on the neighbouring Buvuma Island and preaching on the Sunday. We were grateful to Shem and Catherine Mabongor for hosting us at the YWAM base on Lingira.

September saw an interesting development for the hospice, a link with the Uganda Government Men and Women's Prisons in Mbale. Sheila Hannallah had visited the women talking about health issues and family planning, and then there was a donation from Bex's church for medical care. Bex and I visited both prisons on 25th September and were well received by the officers in charge. The prison buildings date from colonial times. The basic buildings are still sound but items such as electrical fittings, mosquito screening and plumbing have all deteriorated with time. Also, especially on the men's side, the prison population may be quite high, with the three month supply of drugs from the government only lasting two to four weeks. So far we have supplied items for wounds, basic diagnostic equipment (a stethoscope and sphygmomanometer each side), basins and a mattress for the sick bay bed in the women's prison, as well as renewing the lighting and sockets in the male sickbay and TB/HIV ward.



Unfortunately we have had major staffing problems at the hospice for four months. Initially in August/September the nurses were very short staffed. Dinah was on maternity leave and both Josephine and Martin were still upgrading, while Betty is still the acting In Charge at Buwasunguyi. Abruptly all the unregistered nurses from the disputed 2006/2007 nursing exams were told to report to the nearest regional hospital for two months' unpaid internship. This affected Richard and Merab, so that the two oldest staff members Cissy and Jane had to cover with the nursing assistants. Next Mid, the only full time Clinical Officer (CO), casually announced that she was taking a month's unpaid leave from 15th September because of 'family problems'. We were awaiting a response to an advertisement for a new CO anyway, but, before we could interview, Samuel Okech, the full time laboratory technician, arrived at work on 25th September smelling of alcohol. Bex and I sent him home immediately to provide a written explanation. Instead he 'disappeared' and after two weeks was deemed to have resigned! Eventually we interviewed two newly qualified COs and a laboratory technician, Fred Ekobat. Fred started work on 24th October, by which time Mid was taking another three weeks off work, the newly appointed

CO had failed to report to work and Emar, the cook/cleaner, seemed to be constantly off sick. A week later Emar admitted she was leaving so we decided to split her job and employ a cook and a cleaner. It is relatively easy to obtain support staff, and by 10th November we had employed Juliet Enagu (cook) and Olive Mukisa (cleaner). Mid finally reported back on 3rd November when I was quite exhausted. I immediately started assessing two new COs; we formally interviewed them on 12th and appointed Janet Nabulo who started the following work. As with all COs trained in the government school of clinical officers (SOCO) in Mbale she needs very close mentoring.

In the midst of the staff upheavals October 2nd was a red letter day when we collected the new Toyota Landcruiser. Fortunately Kathryn's departure coincided with the arrival of Bex's friends, Trevor and Gill, so we both had company driving two vehicles and the usual boxes of drugs back to Mbale. We had not even had the vehicle for a week when a motorcyclist overtook a parked minibus carelessly, and smashed the driver's side mirror, but since that baptism of fire the vehicle has been much appreciated. The cassette player is also popular on the weekly drive to and from Buwasunguyi. Thankfully I still have a dozen Christian cassettes, although newer recordings are all on CDs.



Kathryn & guide, Simon



Jan & festive Landcruiser



Child of Hope Nursery

Bex, the excellent administrator, has been working a four day week. In the lead up to her first wedding anniversary on 1st December she informed that she will now work three days per week. She finds that her stamina is less than before her stroke in May 2006, but more importantly she and her husband Moses have their own NGO: Child of Hope. This includes a nursery school with mainly very poor Karamajong children from Namatala, one of the slum areas in Mbale. Bex is training her new administrative assistant Rose to carry out all the routine administrative tasks such as salaries and daily book-keeping.

One of Bex's brothers-in-law is Dr Peter Olupot-Olupot whose interests are paediatrics and epidemiology. He was heavily involved in the 3 day Mbale 2008 HIV/AIDS Update Conference for Senior Clinicians from 18th to 20th November at which I was one of several local speakers, the main speaker being Dr Jeanette Meadway, as Honorary Consultant at Mildmay Hospital, London. I had to miss the final sessions on the Thursday because Betty and I needed to attend the Uganda Protestant Medical Bureau (UPMB) Symposium in Kampala on 21st November. As usual many things needed to be achieved, and I was greatly helped by Ken and Heather Davidson, my teaching friends in Kampala. Between us we collected morphine from Mulago National Referral Hospital, picked pre-ordered drugs to last over Christmas from Joint Medical Stores, and also took the Landcruiser to Toyota for its free 1000Km service. On the Sunday I was able to visit Betty's relatives in Seeta on the outskirts of Kampala, and then we drove to Jinja to have lunch with part of my Ugandan 'family' before returning to Mbale.

Wishing you God's blessings over Christmas and the New Year.

Jan