

Uganda Visit September 2011

The Team

Paddy: Engineer

Ross: Theology student

Drew: Doctor

Alan: Doctor

Derek: Bossman

The Task

Medical centre

Children's centre

Women's small business project

Surviving safari

Medical centre

I'm always amazed at the changes and advances at the medical centre every time we visit. The centre runs with 18 members of staff, ranging from clinical officers and nurses to Ronald the security guard, who has somewhat unique methods of ensuring the safety of the clinic patients! (see picture). We were fortunate enough to have another doctor on board for this trip; Alan, and were grateful for his experience as a GP.

Our time was spent rotating around each department in the clinic, which covered the laboratory, consultation rooms, dispensary, and inpatient rooms. It's always uplifting to see the same dedicated Ugandans working in the clinic every year; testament to the fact Capstone is having a positive impact in Lugazi.

We spent the first few days finding our feet in the clinic and adjusting to the different approaches of patient consultations and management. With a considerably varied disease demographic, managing patients single handedly is not something you can rush into as a medic. Diseases such as malaria, typhoid, microfilaria are all too common in Uganda and something which we rarely encounter back home. As a result, we observed numerous consultations with the clinical officers, and discussed their approaches to management. Everyone at

the clinic was always open to suggestions and discussions about each patient.

The team is always looking for ways to develop the clinic further, as there is so much potential, particularly with the energy and dynamism of each member of staff. The task this year was to assess the potential of expanding the pharmacy. At present, the dispensary provides medicines for a small fee to those who can afford, and free to those who cannot. This still generates a reasonable amount of income for the clinic, and one idea is to develop this further with a view to dispense to surrounding clinics and medical centres in Lugazi, this would also save them a long journey to Kampala to collect the medicines themselves. At present this idea is undergoing preliminary investigation as we plan to gauge interest from other clinics over the next few months.

Outreach

The medical outreach initiative was set up a few years ago with the view to bring medical treatment to rural villages. This was aimed at patients who are unable to travel to the nearest towns and who cannot afford medical care. We were able to travel to two of the villages during our visit: Bibbo and Namagunga.

Villagers eagerly await the arrival of the outreach team, comprising of around 8 healthcare professionals squashed into an ambulance like sardines (see picture). Each visit begins with a health education talk provided by one of the nurses. This covers family planning, sexually transmitted diseases, and signs and symptoms awareness for common infectious diseases such as malaria.



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REPORT



The villagers then disperse to the relevant services available. Some see the clinical officers and doctors in a medical consultation, some take their children for immunizations (provided free of charge by the local hospital), and others receive HIV testing from the laboratory technician. A dispensary service is also offered on the outreach, providing antibiotics, anti-malarial drugs, and analgesia.

I'm always amazed with two things in regards to the outreach. Firstly, medical staff remain in the village until the very last patient is seen. Countless times we have had to use torches, gas lamps and even the lights on the ambulance to examine patients in complete darkness. Secondly, patients take great responsibility in their own healthcare. Some villagers are fortunate enough to buy small note books that act as their medical notes. They bring these books to each consultation and doctors are able to check their previous medical encounters. I sat proudly during a visit to Bibbo when I found one of my own entries in a patients book from 4 years ago, containing the same illegible handwriting!

Safari

It is essentially a Capstone tradition now that every trip invariably finishes with a safari adventure to Murchison falls. This excursion is eye opening and awe inspiring for first timers and a welcome return to the wild for the veterans. Murchison falls and the surrounding area has a plethora of wildlife, ranging from elephants and giraffes to lions and hippos (even in the campsites) and monkeys galore. The geography of the land is also spectacular; valleys and savanna converge to create a varied landscape of trees, shrubs, grass and desert. The wildlife seem on the most part oblivious to humans and carry on their daily business of eating, relaxing, and playing despite having an audience. The sunrise is swift but breathe taking, the sunsets are equally as magnificent, a truly wonderful way for a tourist to finish a visit to Uganda, a genuine taste of the 'Pearl of Africa'.

Included in the safari is one day boat trip along the Nile. This little adventure is anything but 'little', the crocodiles are huge as are the hippos, and the falls (when you finally get to them) tower ominously above the tourist boats. The foam created by the falls slowly flows down the Nile for miles upon miles, a small yet powerful reminder of the raw and untamed wild which is Murchison falls. All in all a tremendous experience, everyone who has the privilege to visit Uganda must grab this opportunity with both hands!

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