Children with Cancer in Malawi

UK Registered charity no. 1111112

Contact: childrenscancermalawi@ncl.ac.uk
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Summer 2015 Newsletter

Ten years of CCM...

The childrens' cancer ward in Blantyre is very busy at the moment and Professor Molyneux and the team are working hard to treat the children. Thanks to you all they have had enough chemotherapy drugs, as well as drugs to stop sickness, to treat the increasing number of children seen on the ward. The team in Malawi and the CCM Trustees are incredibly grateful for all the amazing support and generosity of all our supporters, and especially those at St Andrews, which have enabled many children to be treated, and an ever increasing number to be cured of their cancer.

It is now nearly 10 years since our charity first began and we thought it good to reflect on how things have moved forward in this time. Although the teams in both Malawi and Newcastle are 10 years older, the enthusiasm and passion to help the children with cancer in Malawi remains undimmed.

There are more cancers that are now treatable in Malawi than 10 years ago. Ten years ago, there was no treatment for children with leukaemia. The treatments developed 5 years ago by CCM in conjunction with Professor Molyneux have led to over 100 children being treated on protocols that are increased in intensity and have a higher cure rate. In fact, Professor Molyneux has had 8 children with leukaemia admitted in the last 3 weeks. These children come from all over Malawi as the word has spread that leukaemia can now be treated. Together, we have also helped improve the survival rates of children with Burkitt lymphoma, by designing a new protocol and by providing the drugs to treat the disease. Also, some eye tumours and low-grade brain tumours are now being treated.

CCM has also bought many pieces of equipment over the years, which have helped care for the children. The microscope camera bought by yourselves to help diagnose conditions via. electronic links with the team in Newcastle, has to-date looked at over 1500 samples, and has enabled the Malawi team to more accurately treat children. We also buy special cartridges for the machine that allows blood salts to be measured, which is essential in the acute management of children with cancer.

We help with clinical advice on a weekly basis and have helped train the nurses on the unit (mainly through Sister Hannah Di Lullo, one of our CCM Trustees). We have paid the salaries of a number of nurses on a year-on-year basis, including the now well established St Andrews nurse (Sister N'Gonga) thanks to the generosity of its parishoners. As well as helping with critical staff, CCM have provided many chemotherapy drugs, as well as drugs to stop vomiting and to treat infections. This year, we also managed to provide antifungal treatment for those very sick children with fungal infections.

Outside the hospital, CCM provided a motorbike for Mr. Banda to allow follow up visits across the Malawi countryside, essential for determining how well treatment is working. The outdoor shelter we built at the hospital for the children and their families, allows them to sit outside protected from the sun and rain, and has been a well received addition.

Without your amazing generosity, none of this would have been possible. Your contributions have made a real difference to the treatment of children with cancer in Malawi. It is hard to imagine that we have been helping for so long, but sadly the economic situation in Malawi is as bad as ever, and this year it is officially the world's poorest country.

Your sustained enthusiasm and continued help astounds us all.

Thank you very very much!

Zikomo Nduthi.

The Children with Cancer in Malawi Trustees.

An update from Blantyre

By Prof. Elizabeth Molyneaux

Today we have sent three of our leukaemia patients home after they finished their week of intensive treatment. For two of them it was a stormy time with high fevers and anaemia – but they have pulled through and we are all pleased and happy for them. One little boy is still in the ward waiting for his extensive shingles to settle. Leukaemia is difficult to treat in our setting; the frequent visits to hospital, the long periods of low immunity when they are exposed to malaria and other infections, with underlying poor nutrition, tax us all.

We have made very good use of the antiviral and antifungal treatments that Children with Cancer in Malawi sent to us. They have saved lives.

Throughout all of this the children and their mothers show admirable grit and quiet kindness.

Yesterday a teenager was to go to theatre for a major operation on his jaw but when called to go his mother decided she needed to discuss more with the extended family, so today they have gone home to see the relatives. We can but hope they will return in time.

Our guardian shelter (an area outside the ward where people can meet and talk) and our cooking shelter, where the guardians cook together over the weekend, had been damaged by heavy rain and the cooking area had become unusable. We have been able to repair these two simple structures and they make a great difference to the comfort of in patients and their visiting families.

Yesterday when we were doing a ward round, as soon as we had seen a child, if he was well enough, he rushed off to the play area in the ward. We were struck by the number of children enjoying colouring, playing with puzzles and the toys that have been sent from Newcastle. A visiting medical student commented on how nice it is to see children being children in the hospital.

The rest of the department is quieter than usual – the malaria season is over, the harvest is in and there is less gastro-enteritis. Oncology seems increasingly busy however; we have had a full ward, sometimes with mattresses on the floor, for the last several months and the nurses are stretched. They are looking forward to a visit from Sister Hannah Di Lullo from Newcastle, who will be with us by the end of the month. Her visits always raise morale and she teaches us all a great deal.

Thank you for all your support over the years – it continues to make a huge difference to the quality of care we can give to the children with cancer here.

Father Michael Corbett

Father Michael, a long standing supporter of CCM - both via. St Andrews and his role at the Royal Victoria Infirmary - is unfortunately unwell at the moment. We all wish him the very best, he is very much in our thoughts.

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