Children with Cancer in Malawi

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Autumn-Winter 2022 Newsletter

Ian Sharkey

Ian Sharkey, one of our original Trustees and past Chair of CCM, sadly passed away recently. Ian was a remarkable man, a fantastic oncology pharmacist and an amazing human being who was always kind and thoughtful. He will be sadly missed. Our thoughts are with his wife Joan and their family.

News from 2022

March was a amazing month, as we manged to get back to Malawi after not having been since 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr Chagaluka and the team were very welcoming and it was fantastic to see them all again. It was especially wonderful to see the children in the ward. Professor Molyneux was visiting at the same time which made for very productive discussions.

The Malawian team have done a great job during the pandemic. Congratulations to George Chagaluka, who is now the Head of the Paediatric Department, adding to his large workload. Dr Beatrice Phiri is now in Cape Town undergoing her 2-year training programme in paediatric oncology. Dr Chagaluka, Professor Molyneux and Simon Bailey spent time together developing the next 10-year plan for the Unit. There are exciting projects on the horizon, such as a new ward and outpatient facility since the old Unit is creaking at the seams. We will keep you updated.

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Thanks to your amazing and continued generosity, including our friends at St Andrews, we continue to purchase vital chemotherapy drugs, pay nurses salaries and pay for running and maintaining the full blood counter and electrolyte machine in Blantyre. The remote pathology service remains as vital as ever. The team continue to grow and are increasing their range of treatments, but they are still very reliant on our support.

Thank you once again, on behalf of the children and team in Malawi as well as the Trustees of Children with Cancer in Malawi, for being so wonderful and unselfish with your support.

The CCM Trustees

Returning from Malawi

by Prof. Elizabeth Molyneux

I am in the plane from Blantyre to Manchester via Addis, having been visiting Blantyre for the last two weeks for a series of meetings. But in between the meetings I was in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and joined George and the team on the oncology ward. It is always a pleasure to be back and this time it was especially good to see the extension to the ward, which George will tell you about. Just having a few more beds, makes the whole ward feel less crowded and more manageable.

Four new patients with Burkitt lymphoma came in over those few days and it was good to be able to look over George's shoulder as he photographed the cytology slides that Richard the lab technician had prepared and stained. It is one of the easier diagnoses to make on a slide though we are so glad to have Dr Peter Carey in Newcastle reporting on them and all the other, much more difficult ones, he is sent to interpret every week. Peter's help is indispensable.

A donation of more and varied cytotoxic drugs has meant that some of the treatment protocols have been able to be expanded and time will tell us if this has been successful or not.

There is a nurse with special responsibility for the children with retinoblastoma and her efforts to ensure completion of treatment schedules and follow up have been good. But it was sad to see a little, malnourished, 2 month old baby admitted with a very opaque left eye in need of chemotherapy and surgery; at least the diagnosis was made and referral done before the tumour spread beyond the orbit or developed in the other eye.

As Europe and the UK were having their hottest weather ever recorded this Summer, in Malawi was very cold! It was Winter but this season it was unusually long and cold. This cold, in combination with a cyclone earlier this year, meant that the harvest was poor in many parts of the country and people struggled to find enough to eat. Medical staff anticipate a high number of admissions of malnourished children to the hospital.

The children, their families and staff are always so grateful for what you do for them. It is humbling to see how much a small contribution is able to do, and I join them in saying 'thank you' to you all.

Latest Updates from Blantyre

by Dr George Chagaluka

WARD EXTENDED

The Paediatric oncology services at Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital started in 1997, following the opening of a 16-bedded children's cancer ward, whose build was paid for by Southern Bottlers Limited. In the first 3 years, 532 patients were admitted and half of them had Burkitt's lymphoma. By 2010, the demand for space had increased, and the Beit Trust renovated and extended the ward to 23 beds.

The population of Malawi is increasing. In 1997, the population was 11 million. The current population is 18 million and will grow to 26 million by 2030. A large percentage of the population, 46%, is under 15 years of age.

Although the burden of infectious diseases is on the decline, the burden of non-communicable diseases is on the rise. The number of the new cases of paediatric cancer is currently at 279 cases per year. Recently, the 23 bed ward has become overcrowded – to help with this, we have been allowed to extend our footprint into the adjacent neurosurgical ward.

This has greatly helped our capacity, but the arrangement is only a short term solution. The long term solution will involve the construction a spacious ward with facilities befitting a modern Paediatric Cancer Unit.

NEW MEMBERS OF STAFF

Patience Juwa has been recruited as a Psychologist. Her role is to deal with emotional challenges that patients, parents and staff face on daily basis. Patience holds a Bachelor's degree in Psychology obtained from the University of Malawi. Patience is always patient with everyone that seeks help from her. During the peak of COVID-19, Patience was providing emotional support to patients and families affected by the pandemic.

Aida Nkhoma is a Play Therapist. She provides emotional support to children during their various procedures by engaging them with various play activities to dispel their fears as well as to cope with their discomfort. Aida had four years of work experience providing psychosocial support to children before joining the team. She has a degree in Social Sciences from the University of Malawi, Chancellor College. Aida loves following current affairs, listening to music and travelling to appreciate nature.

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Donate

You can donate at: www.childrenscancermalawi.org/donate or by post at: Children with Cancer in Malawi, 39 Reid Park Road, Jesmond, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE2 2ER, United Kingdom.