Children with Cancer in Malawi

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Summer 2024 Newsletter

2024 Visit to Malawi

It was wonderful for us to be back visiting Dr Chagaluka and his team at Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital (QECH). Pleasingly obvious progress has been made since our visit last year. As always, we were treated as members of the team, who were very gracious and loving hosts. Professor Molyneux, Professor Bailey and Sister Di Lullo from Newcastle all made a coordinated visit to help with strategic planning for the future of the Unit, as well as providing invaluable teaching and guidance, especially to the Malawi team's nurses.

L-R: Dr Chagaluka, Prof. Bailey, Prof. Molyneux, Sr Di Lullo, Matron Kamwendo, Dr Israels.

It was wonderful for them to be back in Blantyre and it continues to be humbling to see the great work done with such enthusiasm despite limited resources, and to see how Dr Chagaluka has continued to build on the foundations Professor Molyneux laid.

Great progress is being made and the team punch well above their weight given their resources. A big thank you, once more, to all of CCM's supporters for your continued invaluable support at the QECH, without which the Unit would not be able to continue to flourish anywhere near the same degree.

Zikomo Kwambiri.

The CCM Trustees

Latest Update from Blantyre

by Sister Hannah Di Lullo

What a delight it always is to arrive at Chileka airport, Blantyre, Malawi – after about 24 hours' travel from Newcastle - to embark on another busy and rewarding week with staff and patients on the children's cancer ward at QECH! In March of this year, I joined Simon Bailey, Liz Molyneux and Trijn Israels for a week of catching up on progress made, observing staff at work, teaching and future planning of projects and goals to work on.

This was actually my 8th visit - my first one being in 2011 - and I am overwhelmed by how much progress has been made since then. As a paediatric oncology nurse, I have had the privilege of being warmly welcomed onto the ward and been able to see how the nurses and other members of the team care for all the children and families so well, even though they only have a fraction of all the equipment and facilities available to them, compared with children's cancer services in the UK. That said, since 2011 the progress they have made is outstanding. This is in no small part due to all the very kind donations that have been made to our charity - Children With Cancer in Malawi.

For example, the team are now able to deliver the vital chemotherapy drugs to children who arrive in desperate need of treatment. They often travel from very far, and on foot, as local clinics and hospitals do not have the services, staff or equipment to deal with children's cancers. The ward in Blantyre offers and delivers much needed symptom relief and, with some types of cancer, a chance of cure.

This visit I was very excited to hear about the experiences of Matron Anizia and Sister Elizabeth, who had recently returned from a trip to the children's cancer ward in Capetown, South Africa, as part of a paediatric nursing course. Anizia and Elizabeth had worked hard to be able to make this trip and were rewarded by being able to spend several weeks working on the ward there whilst receiving further education, further expanding their knowledge and expertise of paediatric oncology nursing. They were then able to bring their new knowledge and specialist skills back to the ward in Blantyre, where they have already been able to make some changes and improvements to the care the children receive.

Following discussions about their trip and how the delivery of chemotherapy and intravenous fluids could be improved in Malawi, Anizia and her team wanted to explore the possibility of acquiring 2 intravenous pumps. In the UK, all intravenous fluids and drugs are delivered to children and babies using intravenous pumps to ensure the accuracy and safety of volumes given, which can be small for younger children and babies. Up until now, suitable intravenous pumps were not available to the team in Malawi. However, following some kind donations to CCM, it has been possible to purchase 2 intravenous pumps which were delivered with the appropriate training and service contracts needed. Anizia reports that the pumps are easy to use, have been in constant use and are making a huge difference to the delivery of intravenous fluids and drugs. It is incredibly rewarding to see how a small innovation such as this can transform how children are being cared for in Malawi.

Other successes of my trip include ensuring the supply of vital supportive care drugs and certain chemotherapy agents continues, following donations to CCM. This was one of the very first objectives for our charity and continues every year to plug the gaps of an often intermittent and uncertain local drug supply. We use a drug supply company in India where we can order all the drugs needed by the team in Malawi and which can then be delivered safely on site.

And finally, one of the highlights of the trip was handing out a suitcase full of toys that had been given to Simon Bailey by a nurse colleague in the UK. Watching the children's eyes light up as the suitcase was unpacked was wonderful. One group of boys spent hours playing with all the toy cars and every time I walked on the ward, they were sitting together having a game. Play becomes such an important part of the day for the children who often have to spend weeks on the ward whilst receiving treatment. It was great to meet up with Aida again, the ward's play worker. She showed us her toy cupboard which houses toys for all age groups and from which she chooses appropriate toys each day for the children to play with, including the toys that arrive every Christmas from ourselves. One game which proved very popular this time was the old classic – Buckaroo!

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Anyone can use 'CAF' to raise money for CCM through online sponsorship, or to donate. It's free for charities (aside from credit card charges). So, if you're thinking of doing a fun run, climbing a mountain or any other sponsored challenge, head over to https://cafdonate.cafonline.org/12935#!/DonationDetails and raise money for CCM. Every penny will come directly to us.

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Donate

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