



Mulanje Mission Hospital

Newsletter

August 2023

Mulanje Mission Hospital
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Editorial comment

By Dickson Chisale

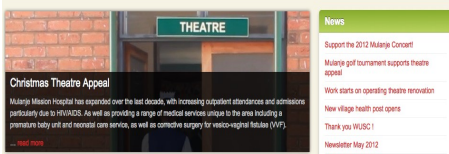
Dear friends, partners and colleagues very high price. of MMH.

It is with excitement that we present to you yet another Newsletter at a time when people within and outside Mulanje Mission catchment area are still recovering from the effects of Cyclone Freddy.

People started farming soon after the devastation when the soils had enough moisture, and today, there are plenty of sweet potatoes, many families are surviving on it. In some areas people are doing irrigation farming now, though there is a challenge to access fertilizer due to its

MMH is also taking part in alleviating the suffering of cyclone Freddy affected people from its catchment area through provision of free health care services to under five children, pregnant women and also to people with chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, asthma and epilepsy. MMH, with funding from our donors, is also providing food support, and materials to needy families for (re)constructing houses and long lasting toilets to enhance hygiene. Enjoy reading our latest news and keep in touch!

Keep up to date with all the news from MMH.
MMH website is regularly updated



Visit our site at
www.mmh.mw

Please send feedback to
info@mmh.mw

Medical Director runs Porters race for Maternal and Child health

Dr Arie Glas, Medical director of MMH, ran the Porters race on 8 July.

The Porters race is an annual race with a distance of approximately 25km and 1500 altimeters up and across the Mount Mulanje Biosphere Reserve.

By running the Porters race, Dr Arie raised funds to renovate the Mother and Child health clinic at the hospital. This clinic building needs to be refurbished, this was done over 10 years ago.

MMH treats 2200 children under five very month and 2400 women receive antenatal care, cervical cancer screening and advice and help with family planning.

Dr Arie being supported with food and water by colleagues Tikondwe Katumbi and Felix Tembo during the race



Mulanje Mission Hospital Health Board, Management and staff would like to notify the various donors and partners of the demise of Mr Rington Taibu who until his death was the Health Coordinator for CCAP Blantyre Synod.

He has been instrumental in guiding the hospital, especially organizing the

health board meetings. The Blantyre Synod management, Board of Directors and Mulanje Misson Hospital staff will miss his contributions to the managing of the health institutions under Blantyre Synod. He was a regular visitor to the hospital.

May we all remember put his wife and family in prayers.

**From the medical directors' desk -***- by Dr. Arie*

There is a lot to write about again this edition. It is winter in Malawi, with misty mornings and cold nights here in Mulanje. The weather has been unusually dry for the time of year. This is a relatively quiet time in the wards, giving us time for teaching and quality improvement work. Teaching has certainly been a focus over the past few months, with several young clinicians and nurses joining the hospital.

As Malawi's health budget is under pressure, replacement of staff has not been authorized by the Malawi government for a long period, 2 years now. To keep a manageable operational budget, some senior staff leaving have had to be replaced with interns and junior professionals who are taught on a daily basis. Shortages of fuel and medicines have had a serious impact on Malawi during the past months. We have managed to keep our pharmacy largely stocked until now, but this requires constant attention and re-allocation of funding.

The Eye department has continued to develop with a new partnership with Sight 2020, a charity related to optical company EssilorLuxottica. Sight 2020 provided all material and equipment for an optical shop; as the hospital has appointed an optometrist. Together

with an Eye nurse, the optometrist is seeing patients on a daily basis, often helping them immediately with basic eye medicine, small procedures and (reading) glasses. Patients who require cataract or other surgery are booked for the next surgical session. We are glad to have established a formal partnership with SLAH, a Dutch foundation committed to fund regular cataract surgeons coming to MMH. We as well continue working with Zomba Central Hospital ophthalmology department and Christian Blind Mission.

The Head of Station opened a new hospital Store last month. This renovated building enables us to put all stocks together in one place — safer and more efficient. In some of the old stores other services can be housed now, such as the tuberculosis service and IT-office—something to make happen in the coming months. We're grateful for the growing relationship with Stichting Nieuwe Waarde from the Netherlands, who are funding both the Eye work, the Stores renovation and contribute to the Sustainable Livelihoods Programme.

The SL programme staff in their annual report (available on mmh.mw/about-us) document a wide variety of activities to improve the livelihoods in the area. For example, they share how Vil-

lage Savings and Loans Association share significant amounts of money, enabling families to make investments in schooling for their children. Irrigation farming continues to provide higher incomes and better nutrition, but also smaller and simpler interventions such as beekeeping and promotion of energy efficient cooking methods have an impact. This part of our work is vital as the climate changes and farming has to be reformed—see also the article by Anjali on page 3.

We enjoyed visits from our friends from Fane Valley and the Good Little Company, the MMH Trust in the United Kingdom and many others as visitors from Europe and the USA have returned post-Covid.

With EMMS International from Scotland, the work around prevention of teenage pregnancy is continuing. Difficult economic circumstances are a key driver for teenage pregnancy—so important that it is addressed. EMMS and MMH also continue to invest in water and sanitation at other health facilities in Mulanje and neighbouring districts. We've just completed safe water supply and proper toilets at three rural, hard-to-reach health centres.

Thank you all for your interest and support and keep in touch.

Climate change is one of the biggest health threats of this century. Countries such as Malawi increasingly suffer from heatwaves, spread of infectious diseases, and extreme weather events, for example cyclone Freddy. Healthcare facilities such as MMH hold an unique position to implement planetary health interventions both in the hospital and in surrounding communities. During my internship in MMH, I have seen several great examples of these interventions and I would like to highlight a few here.

First of all, clinicians in MMH are less wasteful than that in the Netherlands. The diagnostic process is mostly based on history taking and physical examination of the patient. Additional investigations are only performed whenever this would truly change the course of treatment.

The production of waste is consciously and unconsciously prevented. MMH uses many types of 'reusables' rather than their disposable counterparts in Dutch hospitals. Examples of these include, but are not limited to, the use of washable theatre linen (See below picture), metal instruments, and washable menstrual pads.



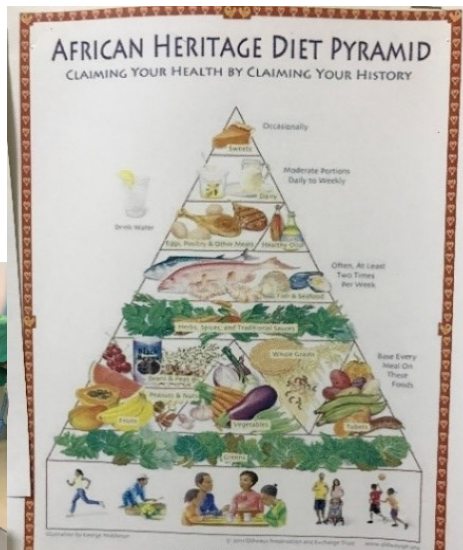
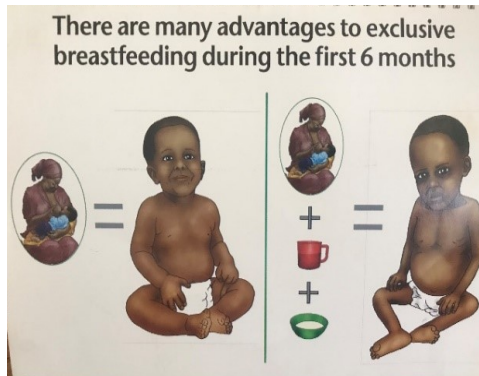
Reusable linen and instruments in the operating theatre

When a reusable option is not (yet) available or safe to implement, waste should be minimised by reducing its generation. During a Continuous Professional Development session Matron Tabu Gonani presented on ways to minimise rubbish generation in the hospital.

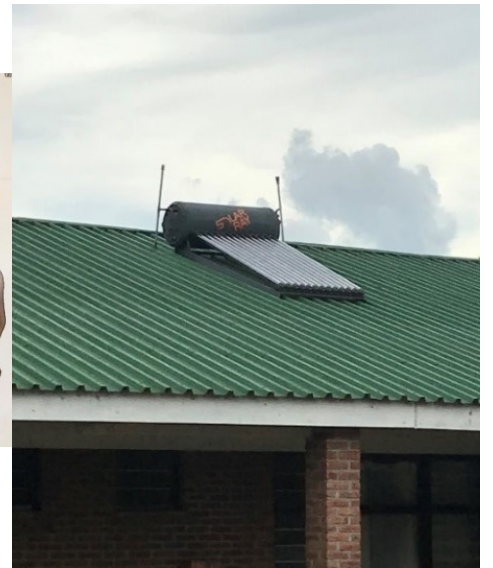
In the Netherlands, physicians

are increasingly interested in plant-based diets as a healthier and more sustainable type of nutrition. The nutritional advice in MMH focussed on 'The African Heritage Diet', for this is also primarily based on leafy greens, fruits, beans, vegetables, nuts, and whole grains.

Breastfeeding and adhering to the African Heritage Diet are encouraged



Energy is primarily generated by solar systems. Using solar panels on the roof of the wards, special batteries are charged throughout the day. These batteries in turn distribute electricity over the hospital, maintaining a reliable supply of electricity day and night. Not only does this safeguard patient care, for example the premature babies on CPAP, it also reduced the use of grid electricity in the hospital by over 50% and almost eliminated the need for diesel.



Sustainable electricity and hot water is generated through solar energy

This programme reaches further than the conventional boundaries of a hospital, and attempts to improve health by advancing welfare in general, while simultaneously addressing environmental issues. One example is the implementation of special cookstoves: changu changu moto (meaning 'fast fast fire' in Chichewa). These stoves use only one third of the firewood that traditional three-stone fires would use. Women have to spend less time collecting wood, time that they can spend on other income-producing activities. Additionally, the changu changu moto's pose less risk of burns and smoke inhalation, preventing COPD. The project is a great example of how the Sustainable Livelihood programme tackles ecological and health issues at the same time.



Solar-powered irrigation system supplying surrounding fields of water

As we can see, MMH already has an abundance of practices and projects that stimulate planetary health. If I had to indicate one area with room for improvement, it would be the procedure of venepuncture. Currently, blood samples are taken by using a disposable plastic glove as a tourniquet. By swapping these for reusable tourniquets, we could save more than 385 disposable plastic gloves per month. Upon my return to the Netherlands, I will start collecting spare ones from friends and colleagues. In this way, I hope to return something to the hospital where I have had a wonderful time and learnt a great deal.

Vocational skills training for orphans and teenage moms

- By Wise Ndawa

Malawi is a member of the African Union and is committed to the implementation of its policies as guided by the African Union Agenda 2063: *“The Africa We Want”*. African countries have committed to speeding up actions that strengthen vocational skills in view of improving entrepreneurship in youth (Ministry of Education, 2020). One of the challenges that are faced, is the low enrolment of female students with less than 30% of the total enrolment which is partly due to stereotypes and cultural beliefs. Also, lack of adequate and relevant infrastructure including inadequate workshops are challenges that are being faced.

Mulanje Mission Hospital started introducing vocational skills training in our Orphans and Vulnerable Children program in 2018 and in the Teenage Pregnancy prevention program in 2020.

Little did we know that supporting a vulnerable child and young women can bear fruits! Since the introduction of vocational skills training, we have so far trained 206

adolescents in various vocational skills such as welding, carpentry, plumbing, bricklaying, and tailoring. The programs aim at improving the lives of orphans, vulnerable children, and young women at community level who dropped out of school due to not passing exams or pregnancy so that they are able to support themselves by establishing small-scale businesses using the skills that they have gained from technical schools.

Next month our Youth Centre Social Workshop will open. Some of the most promising youth that has undergone vocational skills training will be supported at a multi-functional workplace to start businesses as well as be helped in the provision of equipment to take their training forward a step and grow in their skills and entrepreneurship. They will be able to support each other and learn from each other in the workshop and at the Youth Club.



▲ *Graduation from Nasomba technical college*

MMH is implementing the environmental conservation activities under its sustainable livelihoods program. Under the sustainable livelihoods program, MMH seeks to increase access of households and communities to improved cook stoves by disseminating affordable high thermal efficiency and low greenhouse gas emitting cooking stoves called “Changu-Changu Moto” (Meaning: quick quick fire) stove.

Using the improved cookstoves results into:

- ◆ Reduction of firewood and charcoal consumed for cooking
- ◆ Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions
- ◆ Relief from high fuel costs,
- ◆ Reduced exposure to health damaging indoor air pollutions
- ◆ Faster cooking
- ◆ Less risk of accidental burns in children
- ◆ Increased cleanliness and convenience.
- ◆ Reduced firewood and charcoal demand leading to less forest cutting, and reduction of deforestation.

The majority of households in developing countries cook over open



fires. Women, who typically do the cooking, frequently visit health centres suffering from respiratory diseases due to inhaling smoke.

In 2022-23, the initial phase of the programme, community members managed to construct 1,723 cook stoves in five villages. Apart from the construction of the cook stoves the project is also encouraging community members to establish more woodlots in order for the community to have enough fire-

to cook two pots at once very fast. Even my kids can cook without any fear, their safety is always assured. Personally, I used to suffer from cough each and every time, but due the use of Changu-Changu Cook stove am I free now.” said Janet.

Data collected showed that where energy efficient cook stoves are used, there is a reduction in cases of respiratory diseases among women and children compared to those who are still using open-fire cooking. There are also economic benefits since most project Mrs Janet Minyaliwa has able to spend more time working on their farms, rather than collecting fuel-wood in the forest.

Currently, the project is targeting to reach-out to 25,000 households in the two coming years (2023-2025) in 50 villages. The project is in line with Sustainable Development Goals 7 and 13 of Affordable and Clean Energy and Climate Action respectively. This work is funded through Bleubird, a young company based in Northern Ireland.



▲ *The Changu Changu Moto in use*