



The Methodist Church

Michael and Joanne Tetley, Mission Partners, Sierra Leone, March 2008

It's being six months since we arrived at Nixon, and they have been life changing. The last three months have given us a deeper understanding of some of the issues facing the hospital. For instance, access to health facilities is more complicated than just the lack of money to pay medical bills, or lack of good roads to the health facility. It embodies also cultural orientation and beliefs and the role of key influencers within the community. Making health services available to the population therefore involves getting the cooperation of all the stakeholders involved.

The beginning of the year saw the launch of an outreach programme via a mobile clinic to two of the surrounding villages, by the hospital. Considering some of the issues highlighted above, this was not a small achievement. We had to work with the paramount chiefs of the two villages involved – and to involve various specialist people in the hospital to stretch their time and commitments further to cover the outreach programme. This programme is very important to the hospital as it increases accessibility of health services to the surrounding areas. The mobile clinic is on Wednesdays with visits to the villages on alternate weeks. Not only does it enable the hospital to reach and treat some people who may not otherwise have access to health services but also it gives the nursing students field experience and an opportunity to put into practice some of the knowledge taught in the classroom.

There has also been a considerable improvement in our drug stock levels and this is due to a combination of reasons. As reported in the last newsletter we continue to receive considerable stock of drugs from the Christian Health Association of Sierra Leone (CHASL) at reasonable cost. This has helped us stretch our budget considerably as compared to purchasing on the open market. In addition, we have managed to secure considerable stock of drugs from the District Medical Stores- again at considerable low prices. This has reduced the pressure on us as it contributes significantly to our key objective of delivering quality health service to the community.

In January, another doctor from the UK joined us for a six-month assignment period. This has been a real blessing to us at the hospital because it has eased the work pressure on the two resident doctors considerably. This means a doctor is able to join the mobile clinic every week without reducing service provision on outreach days.

In February, Mike King, Team Leader of the Africa desk at World Church Office in the UK visited us at Nixon. This gave us an opportunity to discuss some of the issues – both personal and work-related - with him. Mike was able to access and ascertain the key role that Nixon plays as a health provider to the community.

Dr John Cochrane also visited in February though with different objectives. Dr Cochrane and his church in Redbridge (and together with some Friends of Nixon in the UK) have supported a Community Health Based programme run by the hospital for the past couple of years. This started as a pilot project to improve community health through public health education. He was in Segbwema for a review of the programme. Another key objective was to help map a way forward for the programme and explore avenues for funding the Community Health programme when the funding for the pilot project ceases.



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In February, the pump on the only source of drinking water on the campus broke down. This has placed considerable stress on the provision of water not only to the Nixon but also to the surrounding community as a whole. The good news is that we have managed to locate a technician who can fix the problem – but the cost of repairs is proving a financial challenge.

The Nursing school received a boost from a local NGO when it received funding for the award of scholarships to 10 students of the school. The school however is in need of a number of teaching materials – both for the classroom and practical teaching on the wards. An appeal has been sent out to WCO for help in securing some of these teaching materials.

The staff and workers of both the hospital and the nursing school have made considerable progress, but there is still a lot more to be done. The biggest problem facing the hospital is how to increase income streams. The low patient numbers coupled with the inability of some patients to foot their medical bills continue to pose financial challenges to the hospital.

In addition, the lack of running water and electricity pose their own unique challenges.

The rains are about to set in and we are told to expect the worst. Impassable roads, coupled with an influx of all kinds of creatures – termites, caterpillars, frogs which in turn attract the snakes etc. etc. and of course the good old mosquitoes. The mossies have not been a major hazard to us though we live close to a swamp - maybe because we sleep under nets all the time. However, Little Joelle suffered a serious bout of malaria in February. We are very grateful to God that we had 24-hr access to doctors specialising in treating malaria. It made a great deal of difference to us and we will always be grateful.

Despite all that has been said, we are actually all looking forward to the advent of the rainy season since it marks the beginning of planting and all that goes along with farming. Even for us at the hospital, this could mark the beginning of an exciting time because for the first time the hospital is considering branching into farming as part of our strategy to reduce our dependence on one source of income stream. We have earmarked a number of plots of land on hospital site for farming purposes and we are all looking forward to the rains.

Despite the challenges at the hospital, we still take time to enjoy the country and its beautiful scenery and beaches. We had the opportunity during Easter to visit the No 2 River Beach on the Freetown peninsular. This was a treasure trove. The beach has miles of incredible white sand and calm clear waters. It was just amazing. We were invited by a local man to take a canoe trip up the river, which empties into the beach – hence the name – to see a waterfall and wild monkeys and birds but we turned down the invitation for another day.

The country is so beautiful and we continue to discover 'gems' just round the corner. It is easy for one to miss such beauty amidst the tremendous challenges and difficulties that are glaring us in the face but we are grateful to God that He continually gives us the wisdom to sit back, reflect and relax whilst enjoying the beautiful world He has created all around us. One cannot fail to notice the rolling hills, gorges and rivers of Sierra Leone as one drives along. The beauty is outstanding.

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Apparently, this creeper flowers once every two years. Unfortunately, we don't know its name – so any suggestions?

Picture courtesy of Mike King