

BANSANG HOSPITAL APPEAL NEWSLETTER - DECEMBER 2010

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Charity No. 1064469

In April I was thrilled and honoured to be made a Member of the National Order of the Republic of The Gambia (MRG), by His Excellency President Yahya A J J Jammeh. The MRG was awarded in recognition of the amazing achievements that have been made at Bansang Hospital (BH) during the past 18 years. This has been possible thanks to the incredible support and generosity of our many supporters; the award was a great honour for me which I accepted on behalf of all of you who have helped BH to become the wonderful place of healing that it is today.

I was also honoured by an invitation from the British High Commissioner Phil Sinkinson OBE, to celebrate the Queen's Birthday at his residence but because of the flight disruption caused by the Icelandic ash cloud I did not arrive in The Gambia in time. This would have been an ideal opportunity to network talk with various officials from the Government, Industry, Health and Education and other charities working in The Gambia.

On the day of the Awards I travelled to the ceremony with the British High Commissioner, Mr Phil Sinkinson OBE and my son Grant. The BHC was also being honoured with the Officer of the National Order of the Republic of The Gambia (ORO). His Excellency, The President, was extremely welcoming and he has a delightful sense of humour. He remained standing for six hours honouring not only Officials but also the working people of his country. He was then approachable afterwards for me to have my photo taken with him.



I cannot praise Gambia Experience enough for their understanding of my desperate need to reach The Gambia; they kept me informed, almost hourly, until a flight was able to leave.

When we eventually flew out of Gatwick I was really excited to be taking my elder son Grant back with me. He was last there in 1996 aged 20, when he and a friend did an emergency dash to Dakar to collect a stranded lorry containing a blood refrigeration unit as well as other vital supplies. After an eventful and sometimes dangerous journey they reached BH and Grant remained for a month helping out. This time I couldn't wait to see his reaction to the changes that had been made in the last 14 years.



He couldn't believe his eyes! The happy staff, a brighter, cleaner environment, the upgrading of many buildings, and the ongoing work in this area amazed him. While I was involved within the hospital, Grant investigated how to improve the environment in the grounds. Patient's escorts have to live in the compound of the hospital. Many sleeping outside and in corridors, their cooking and washing is all done within this area, as a consequence rubbish disposal (there is no refuse collection), is a problem. Education is ongoing for the people coming in from the rural villages, to teach them basic hygiene and proper rubbish disposal. We have just ordered 15 wheelie bins to replace the half oil drums used at present. A donkey cart transports all the collected rubbish to a hole in the hospital grounds for burning. This does not include hospital waste, which is incinerated. Vermin are a continual problem, and we have 2 permanent pest controllers who were trained by Peter Trotman from MITIE Pest Control, who continue to donate necessary pesticides.

New Staff – It was realised we needed a second Play Therapist. We welcome Sunkaru, who has a delightful way with the children, and enjoys the toys as much as they do! Grant spent time with Kumba and Sunkaru, showing them the new toys, and rearranging the layout of Julie's Playroom to maximise space and play capacity.



We have 7 more new members of staff, who up until now have been working voluntarily. They include a trainee electrician, 3 nurse attendants, 2 pharmacy assistants and a records clerk. A number of staff are working full time, without pay, because they would rather work than sit around at home. They all hope one day to be taken onto the payroll. If you would like to sponsor/contribute towards a member of staff I would be delighted to hear from you. It costs BHA £21 per month; this will help to support the worker and their extended family.

My August Visit – Sound Seekers is a voluntary fundraising charity; their mission is to alleviate deafness and the causes of deafness in the developing world. After their successful visit in February, I arranged to meet Malcolm Garner, Debra York, and Steven Tucker to source a suitable area within the hospital to convert to an Audiology Unit, which will comprise of a consulting room, and a sound proof room. They will now begin the process of fundraising to achieve what will be the first ever Audiology unit, serving the 600,000 population of the BH catchment area.

Obstetric Suite – the hospital maintenance team are tackling their first major project within the hospital. All bricks have to be made by hand and their tools can best be described as basic but the team are glowing with pride and enthusiasm. I am a fan of the TV programme Casualty, and noticed they had walls built with glass blocks. I realised these would be perfect for BH, the termites can't eat them, they help with soundproofing, they are obscure without cutting out the light – in fact perfect. We have managed to source a supply in Banjul so another "first" for BH – glass walls!



Rotary Club of Norwich – The 40' container with the equipment for the Burns unit arrived. In temps of 40°C and a humidity of 95% I had to clamber into the container and pull out a battery operated microscope (see below) and the Autoclave a sterilizing unit, which were needed for immediate use.



Equipment that can operate on a battery backup for all the hours we have no electricity is absolutely vital and lifesaving. The specialist burns dressing were used immediately on a man who had been in the hospital since January. With the new dressings and protocols that are now in place dressings only need to be changed every five days which allows the burns to heal more quickly and causes less distress to the patient. Changing dressings is a time consuming, painful procedure and on busy wards this can be very difficult. The patient will leave the hospital earlier, freeing up the bed. The £32,000 raised by Norwich for the first dedicated Burns beds in The Gambia is again leading the way and saving lives. BH and its patients are so grateful for your dedication.



Rotary Club of Brentwood a Becket – have again raised a considerable amount of money, which has enabled BHA to purchase a portable ultra-sound scanner, which was delivered in October. This will save patients trekking the 400mile round trip to Banjul. Thank you.

Power up The Gambia (PUG) – Kathryn Cunningham, a medical student, recently formed this charity whose mission is to provide solar powered electricity to hospitals and clinics throughout the country. PUG has raised approx £18k and is organising the replacement of the solar batteries for the Children's Unit, which had died. They also set up a quarterly service and maintenance contract. By the time you receive this newsletter the unit will have 24hr electricity. Thank you from all the children and staff on the unit.

Obituary – It is with great sadness that I report the death of my dear friend Dr. Jenny Moore, wife of Dr. Peter McCormick, my former GP, who became BHA's Chief Medical Advisor. Jenny always made time for me, not only as a friend but always had an answer to any question put forward. Jenny was down to earth with a great sense of humour. Jenny will be so missed and our love goes out to Peter and his family.

Stop Press – PUG has chosen BH as their project for 2011 and their aim is to provide solar lighting and power to essential equipment in all areas. Watch this space for major developments

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