



A Short History of Mutomo Hospital

The Sisters of Mercy from the west of Ireland went to Mutomo in December 1962 at the invitation of the St. Patricks Fathers from Kiltteegan. They went with the express intention of establishing a hospital there. Kitui at that time was considered a very remote area with no health care facilities of any significance and the area was largely unexplored and as far as Christianity was concerned. Some Protestant evangelism had occurred in conjunction with the colonial government of the time, Kenya being under Britain until independence in 1963. The local people were steeped in witchcraft and traditional beliefs. Modern diagnosis and treatment were largely unknown except to the privileged few who moved out of the area for education.

Quickly the four first sisters, all nurses, got to work. They started treating the common illnesses malaria, infections and childhood illnesses. Soon the work of building the hospital started. In 1964 a sister, Marian Dolan, had been sent off to University College Dublin to study medicine with the express intention of her going to Mutomo once qualified.

The hospital was opened in 1966 and the first doctor (from Belgium) came with his sister who was a nurse. They stayed 2 years. There were a couple of other volunteer doctors before Marian joined the band in 1972. By then the hospital was fairly well established although still very elementary by western standards. Electric power was and still is from a generator. Communications has always been a problem and it is only in the last 3 years when the mobile phone network became a reality that we can truly say communication is relatively OK. In the last 3 months e-mail is possible using the mobile phone card. The hospital is still 75 kilometers from tarmac and during the rainy season travel is really hazardous necessitating 4wheel-drive vehicles, mostly pick-up trucks.

In the early years leprosy was widespread in the area and has now thank God been practically eliminated. The present day "leprosy" is HIV/AIDS which unfortunately is quite common. The AIDS pandemic is with us since the mid-80's but it is only in the last couple of years that we are able to get hold of the necessary medications to really treat the disease. It is now one of the main thrusts of the hospital staff with about 600 persons on AIDS drugs every day. Very close monitoring of these patients is required to prevent and treat toxic side effects as well as to ensure that patients really take their medicine and do not develop resistance to the medication. As well as that many of them get infection of all kinds and these must be treated. Sometimes there are 3 or more family members on the treatment, including small children. Tuberculosis is also very common and often complicates the AIDS picture.

For many years Mutomo Hospital trained nurse midwives until the Government set up bigger nurse training schools throughout the country. Many of our staff are trained on the job e.g. the operating theatre staff and they are simply the best!! The hospital tries to be as self sufficient as possible e.g. we make our own intravenous fluids. All medicines have to be transported by truck from Nairobi which is a 5 hour journey even in the dry season.

The surrounding area is classified as semi-arid. The rainfall is precarious with many dry seasons and consequently drought and scarcity of food is common. At times like this malnutrition is rampant especially among the young and the elderly. This is

very hard on AIDS sufferers and many of them succumb to illness at such times.

There is no industry in the area and so unemployment is the order of the day. This leads to idleness, drunkenness from the local illicit brew and even petty crime. Migration for work is common and also it is very difficult for parents to send their children to school. Only in the last 4 years is primary schooling free and parents have still to spend big money to send a child to secondary school. Yet they have little chance of a job without a secondary education.



In the 35 years that Sr. Marian has spent in Kenya there have been advances but the rate of progress in the western world during that time means that the gap is widening all the time. This is compounded by the AIDS problem and there are few Kenyan families today who have not lost many members from AIDS. Yet the stigma of the disease is colossal and it means that there is a lot of denial, secrecy, and reluctance to seek help. The big challenge in the health sector today is undoubtedly to bring treatment and hope to such people and the Sisters of Mercy in Mutomo are very much committed to that.

We work very hard to train the local staff to a high level of dedication and efficiency in all areas. In the last couple of years the Government has helped by posting some trained staff to Mutomo and also paying some salaries of the local staff. This is proving a great help. Because the people are so needy many of them cannot afford hospital fees, however low, and that is where your money goes i.e. to buy medicines and to pay the overheads of keeping the hospital doors open as well as repair and maintenance of the hospital. There is presently an Irish Sister in charge of administration as Jedidah has moved to Nairobi to do some studies in Management. Marian too has moved to a hospital in Nairobi where she is the medical director and from where she helps Mutomo with staff and supplies as much as possible.

The number of expatriate missionaries in Kenya is dwindling by the day, due to aging. They are being replaced by Kenyan priests and sisters and committed lay people. This is a great advance but is also not without its problems. Pray for the young church in the developing world and be patient if things are done differently. It is all in God's plan.

Thank you for your support now and in the past. May you be blessed and rewarded.