

MULANJE HOSPITAL , MALAWI

Dear Friends,

Colchester Meeting has donated money to Mulanje Hospital in south east Malawi. For the past year a young Dr from Colchester, Isobel King, has been working in this well established hospital. Last year her parents, known to several Colchester Friends, visited their daughter and returned determined to try and help the hospital. During Local Meeting for Business, Dave King explained the work his daughter was engaged in. Since then a small group of Colchester Quakers has organised a strategy to support the hospital. This year £3,000 will be sent, with £2,000 added in the following two years (a total of £7,000). The Hospital Director, herself a Scottish Quaker, has been asked to use the funds, if possible, towards strategies to alleviate malnutrition; this is a long term project of the hospital.

Dr Isobel King will speak to Colchester Meeting when she returns to England. Recently she sent a 'newsy letter' which highlighted aspects of her work in recent weeks. This is a part of what she wrote:

"My raison d'être is a hospital full of sick patients and eager colleagues, people to serve and teach. It is a working life full of contradictions. This week, I lost 4 babies. One of them we worked especially hard to save, a little premature baby whose gut just wasn't ready for life outside the womb. I have never been prouder of our nurses, who checked him every 2 hours and injected tiny volumes of sugar into his veins and sucked excess fluid from his tummy so he wouldn't aspirate. They did that for a whole week. I struggle to imagine a place where a baby would get such tender attention, where a staff would be so committed. The day the baby died, each of the nurses wrote me a message, about how we had lost the battle, or fought in vain. I reassured them that this was a job well done, that we had lost a fight but had fought well, and nothing makes me prouder.....

Amidst the Nursery drama, we sent two newborns to the surgeons in town, one with a stuck hernia and another with a gangrenous foot. But in that ambulance also went a good friend of mine, a wee 11 year old who had a stroke because of HIV back in April. We'll call him Reuben. At the time, he had no movement at all in one side, like a little rag doll. His mother used to carry him in a never-ending piggy back and all I could do was refer him to physio. The week before Christmas, Reuben ran into the office and hugged me. His mum asked me for school supplies. I didn't give her them, but I cried, because I never thought he'd walk again, let alone run or be able to return to school. He's also on cancer treatment for an HIV-related disease called KS, and we have had a nightmare trying to get him the right treatment. In that ambulance this week, one of our nurses delivered him to the Cancer ward at Queens, where he got his treatment and hope was restored. I know as you read this, you might be overwhelmed – no child should have HIV, cancer or a stroke, and this champion has all three – but dwell not on the tragedy. Hold fast to the joy of a running child and a child given medicine because of a staff willing to deliver him personally to where he needs to be.....

It is malnutrition season, and last month, we lost two children to the terrible triad of HIV, malnutrition and dehydration. Like a toxic version of the three musketeers, these diseases are far more deadly together than apart. This week, we have had three children with the same. The littlest also has TB, and if the triad is unfavourable, the quadrad is deadly. When children like her come through, my heart sinks. We have to work so hard for these children, pump them with drugs, monitor their every change and still – even when we do everything right – the diseases conspire against us. But this baby, she has thrived. She has taken her feeds, her diarrhoea stopped, her fever settled. She gained weight. When they arrived, her

Mum said they couldn't stay as they had no money. That same reason was surely why this child was now sick. I said we would pay the bill from Bed Sponsorship. Every day, she told me she couldn't pay, every day I told her we would. Lots of her treatment – HIV and TB meds plus nutritional milk – was free. The rest came to a grand total of £6.50. I discharged her yesterday, home with a mother spared the guilt of knowing that her delay could have cost her baby her life. Pray for her, would you? Pray for their health, their family, their economics. Pray for this child's future, that she would have one, a future full of good things. Pray too for our malnourished boys – we'll call them Ben and Jerry, though God knows their names. They are tweens, already living with HIV for 10 years. Pray their bodies would be made strong, their mischievous spirits would embrace a life of daily medication and they would be back at school before Easter.”

Dr Isobel King

~ Rod Usher, on behalf of Colchester Quakers. 1st March, 2017