

# Amos Update: October 2010



We've had no less than three maternal deaths in the last week which has been rather sad. So far this year we had only had 13 which was considerably better than last when we had 21 overall which was better than the year before at 25 ..... So a few is not unexpected but nonetheless sad. After every death we have a meeting to discuss what factors were contributory and can they be changed. A number of useful things came up this time especially in terms of asepsis in theatre – we get a lot of wound infections which cause a lot of problems although seldom death, so it was helpful to have a focussed discussion on this. One lady, an eclamptic, I judged wrong, and in the fight to save the baby (delaying delivery for it to gain maturity), we lost the mother – a difficult decision of balance between the needs of the mother and the child. Another was a lady who, despite lots of counselling, refused to have any drugs for HIV and lost out. It is of course a personal decision whether to take treatment or not and there are a number of people who do refuse, but I think this is really our first such adamant attitude in PMTCT. The family were reluctant to hear the truth so what the outlook for the baby is, is hard to say.

Dr Elice is proving a great asset to O&G – she is the young Tz MD who has just joined me for a few months. She is caring, committed, intelligent and sensible – what more could anyone ask? We have had a quiet time medical student wise which has been a pleasant change. Two cancelled so for most of October and November we've only had 2 students, both of the longer term variety. The onslaught begins again in December with 5 Ozzies and an extra all descending at about the same time. We have however had a number of other visitors – mostly old friends who it is always a pleasure to welcome again to Muheza but some new folk too. One was a play therapist who came out just for a couple of weeks from Hereford. I'm sure play therapy is very useful and prevents all sorts of morbidity - it was received here with a certain degree of incredulousness and provided confirmation that wazungu are indeed wealthy and bit bizare!

Dr Mahona came to Muheza in early October and completed 16 VVF operations. (Just to remind you, this is when after prolonged labour a hole develops between the patients bladder and vagina leading to incontinence and social ostrasization). The women spend nearly three weeks with us – as Dr Mahona assesses them all, operates – 6 or 7 per day but it still takes all week, they then sit with a catheter for two weeks recovering and finally do some bladder training before the catheter is removed and they can really be declared cured. The first week is full of scared women as they wait for their operation, the second, nervous ones, will it have worked ?? in the third they have relaxed as they are dry and having a happy time together and by the end of it the excitement grows as catheters come

out and they prepare to go home normal again. 2 of them will need to come back as their problems were complex and he could only do them a stage at a time but any progress is better than none. The difference this operation makes to these women's lives is so amazing ....

*I had a trip to Kilifi in Kenya for a few days. This is now the East African Regional reference laboratory for microbiology. I visited Susan a New Zealander who used to work for the Americans in Tanzania, then went to Australia and is now in Kenya working for the British! We discussed a paper we are collaborating on and I brought some more isolates for her lab to serotype. The journey had some memorable moments. I enjoyed drinking tiny cups of strong dark brewed coffee for 2.5p each and eating kashata a local sort of fudge, flavoured with cardamom and coconut with bits of peanut in it bought from a elderly (?80+) gentleman at the bus stand. I didn't enjoy spending 2.5 hours at the border whilst customs took absolutely everything off the bus and examined it in detail!*

*The big news for this month with the research is the publication of the study conducted for the last three years on one of the children's wards at Teule. We were only one of 20 hospitals throughout Africa that participated in this trial however we were the site that recruited the most patients in a study that lasted 5 years in total. The trial compared two treatments for severe malaria – the standard, Quinine (what makes your tonic bitter, used for hundreds of years in South America for treating malaria) with Artesunate - “new” Chinese herb (that they have used for thousands of years). “The bottom line for this huge study is that Artesunate is clearly superior in reducing the rate at which children die from severe malaria from 11% to 8.5%. This, if implemented throughout Africa, and if it works as well out of the study as it did in could save 100,000 lives a year”. The Lancet 376, no. 9753: 1647-1657.*

We are already starting to have water nightmares although whether its a real shortage or just rationing for a variety of reasons is hard to establish. We got down to the last 5 litres last week and were poised to buy buckets when the tap started to drip ..... There was a wonderful photo in the making of 30 buckets all lined up outside the wards by the student nurses but sadly I didn't have my camera. Thankfully its been pouring since then although whether it'll be enough to last through till March remains to be seen.



Zack and his Water Melon plant also hoping for rain!

The garden has however been benefiting with both Zack and Max developing an interest in planting things – Zack's water melon plant now has flowers and Max planted yesterday so we'll see. Meanwhile our passion vine is loaded and the avocado, mango and orange trees covered in flowers. This last especially has the most amazing heavenly heavy scent.

The birthday this month was Zack's and he turned 10 – amazing ! He had a memorable birthday weekend at Peponi where 9 friends joined us on the trip out to snorkel and play on the island and all also stayed to enjoy the pool and camping. The day before had been his teachers 50th party and us ladies had a civilised trip out to the island, carefully timed to enjoy both sunset and moonrise – it was magical.

God bless

Love Sally, Ben, Zack, Max and Piran

## Prayer and Praise

Thanks for the successful VVF operations and for the ladies lives who have been transformed

Pray for the families who have lost their mothers

Pray for Ben as he starts to write up some of the research of the last few years.

Thanks for our big 10 year old Zack