

AMOS Update Jan/Feb 2011

Life is increasingly dominated by the basics somehow and Muheza is becoming an increasingly difficult place in which to live

Water continues to be an issue with everyone getting squeezed more and more folk's cows are now suffering which is hard to know how to manage and the price of buckets continues to go up. Our attitude can be "We have no water - let them drink beer" but maybe not the cows

The hospital bore hole just can't keep up with demand and is drying up again. The kids are now bringing it in from Tanga for us every day - 80l - it doesn't quite do all our washing but really helps. Theatre is a bit of a nightmare - we need to operate for revenue reasons (quite apart from the fact that people are sick !) but getting the gowns in particular clean again is hard. Meanwhile the government in its wisdom is having a campaign about Filariasis (Elephantiasis). Two weeks ago they did a door to door treatment programme - everyone over the height of 1.2 m was given drugs - we all obediently swallowed our Ivermectin and Albendazole. Then the hospital has a contract to do 48 hydrocolectomy's in February (12 per week). So never mind the difficulties with doing the symptomatic booked patients (as well as the emergencies), they're busy case finding those with big balls to take them out ! (apologies to Ben who's concerned about my anatomical correctness (Hydrocele <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hydrocele>> if confused --- Ben) . Then last Tuesday night it RAINED somewhat torrentially (I even went outside with my shampoo !) and Wednesday they turned on water for the town but forgot about the hospital complaints were made and we actually had wet stuff from the taps on Thursday - for a few hours

Power also remains challenging ... we have discovered a rota for power load shedding (rationing) which suggest that we should be off 5 days a week and there's a neat timetable to go with it. We tried to heed it for a while but the "off's" while occurring at least five days a week don't seem to follow the advertised pattern - actual load shedding or just failures ??? And that's not the only problem As I write I am once again acting up for the acting medical superintendant and last night apparently two more of the hospital transformers burst into flame. The one outside my ward did it two weeks ago ... that was a mouse that managed to find a warm place to curl up in for a while So the whole of the town is out of power and I need to find out what's happening ... who knows quite when that will return ... No water is more basic than no power but at least the no water is now predictable and we have our strategies in place the no power is unpredictable and means no fans, no bread and more energy required to keep Max happy as no respite from the old DVD

... well the stop press is that I wrote that last week and we still have no power back ... all Muheza town has been out most of the week although bits come and go at high and low rates which is all rather scary. I think we're waiting for a new transformer for the substation. We're mostly just out and tomorrow are escaping to Peponi we've managed to find a new level to live bread is being baked daily in the poilki with fire above and below and we're getting cold blocks from the hospital so that we can keep the milk cold enough to survive till breakfast

At the end of January on a Friday morning Catherine's (our house-girl's) mama dogo (little mother) died while this was actually an aunt, she did look after Catherine from when her birth mother died when she was about 10. She was also the last of that generation and Catherine is very

sad although not overly upset as it was expected. She'd had a stroke last August and not recovered well from it and had gone down in the last few weeks. She was admitted on Tuesday and I've been looking after her - mostly trying to stop my colleagues from being inappropriately over-active. On Friday we managed to get her to her daughters home in Muheza (Ben took her in the back of the big car) and just made it - she died 5 minutes after getting in - the family were really grateful as they could do the first stages of the Msiba (funeral) at home with the body and people being able to view it which is very necessary here. Then Saturday morning I took the coffin and body and another 10 people back up to her own home in Amani - it's about an hour and a half up into the hills and they all sang beautifully all the way. There was a real peaceful feeling of taking her home to rest. They didn't start the wailing until we'd virtually arrived (thankfully as I struggle with that). There was then lots more body viewing before the actual burial - has to all be pretty quick cos of the heat. By the time I left (actually just before the main event) there must have been over 200 people there - some of whom had got up from Dar just in time Catherine said they'd all stay one night and mourn into Sunday and some would stay till Monday

We've been celebrating Maulidi day (Mohammed's birthday) with a day off that is officially called the sleeping day - to recover from the party the night before. We also got stopped on our way home to allow a big parade through - lots of dancing and tambourine playing with all the men dressed up in their long white robes and hats, while the women followed on behind in a crowd - no photos allowed of course sadly, as it was lovely.

On a somewhat different level there has of course been Valentine's day - I was a tad taken aback to receive a number of texts wishing me a happy day - mostly from colleagues and a Dear darling card to me and my family from her and hers I think its culturally a bit different ...

A pair of interesting Kenyans turned up - doing a project on installing fuel efficient stoves into folks homes - this was a pre- pre-feasibility visit, so there's a way to go but it sounds interesting. Through various connections they stayed at Hillview and we ate with them - an interesting couple - film producers - just completed a film called Doctors without borders (I think) about MSF and due for release in March in the UK - look out for it they say they're going to do a musical next about the 2005 Liberian elections ???

Hawa and I have been invited to attend the CHIVA conference in Cardiff in May - to go with two weeks of attachments hopefully somewhere. This is very exciting on a lot of levels - it is very specifically a PMTCT conference and at the moment Hawa (and Helga, one of the CTC doctors) is having a push to improve care for kids (at the moment we have a kids social club but no dedicated clinic) and also for adolescents. This also needs defining how you move from group to group etc etc so having a chance to see how others have done this will be great. As part of this we have submitted a poster for the BHIVA conference in April which has been accepted and are putting another together for the CHIVA one as well which is all fun. I've been collecting information on pregnant women's attitudes to their HIV disease and its treatment and its amazingly positive in many cases with most of the less well adjusted folk being newly diagnosed who are still getting to grips with it all.

Ben is living it up in Cape Town at a conference (lucky boy). Apologies that this monthly is not up to normal standards but I wanted to get it off by the end of February as we'd missed the end of January ...

Love

Sally, Ben, Zack, Max and Piran



Prayer and Praise

1. For water and power and strength to cope with the vagaries of both
2. For Catherine and her family
3. For a decrease in the burden of Filariasis
4. For courses and conferences both in Cape Town and Cardiff