

Amos Update: November 2010

Having nearly completed this months offering I realise I have nothing much to say about the wards this month– everything else is more interesting – but I have been kept busy with women and children as usual

Helen is a UK GP who has been with us since May as a short termer from the USPG. She spends most of her time running the female medical ward and also does some Palliative care. She does at times despair of the quality of care offered by the clinical officers who sometimes make excellent decisions under difficult circumstances but sometimes make old fashioned or just dubious decisions, seeing every fever as malaria and every wheeze as asthma. She decided to have a go at



Helen Teaching

doing some training with them – the problem usually being finding a time when they can come and haven't got a queue of patients waiting to see them. She has opted for the early morning approach – offering soda and doughnuts, which helps attendance no end! She starts at 8am twice a week and chats about patients that have been seen for 20 to 30 minutes only. On the whole it is proving to be successful with 7 or 8 CO's turning up most times with lively and useful discussions developing.

Tanzania has a new president - well the old one again really – Joachim Kikwete. This was not a surprise and the election passed uneventfully. There generally was a feeling that people were disappointed with what he has achieved in his first 5 years and the opposition made substantial gains but he still had 61% of the vote...

I attended a meeting of the Rotavirus/Paediatric Bacterial Meningitis surveillance program of the Ministry of Health in Dar-es-Salaam. These programs are combined because they involve new vaccines that have (Hib), or we hope soon will be, introduced in Tanzania. We are still the only real data source for the whole of Tanzania for meningitis, which is a rather depressing state of affairs 8 years after the program began. In preparation for the meeting I revisited our data for isolation of Haemophilus influenzae group b (Hib)– a nasty bug that can cause pneumonia, septicaemia and meningitis. If it progresses to become meningitis it is far more serious than malaria or many other infections with quite high mortality rates (about 30%). The vaccination for this disease was introduced in March last year in Tanzania. Our blood culture data for this year clearly shows that the disease is already going away with 14/1000 children tested being positive for Hib in 2008 and 4/1000 in 2010. That is a really encouraging result.

I also attended the 10th anniversary meeting of the Joint Malaria Program this month. This is a slightly uneasy alliance between the Tanzanian National Medical Research Institute, Killimanjaro Christian Medical College, University of Copenhagen and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. JMP is the umbrella under which all the research we have been doing in Teule has been housed. The conference was both looking back at what has been achieved over the last 10 years and what the future may hold. The most important point was the decline in malaria. A paper was presented that showed that the number of times children in 2 villages in the region suffered from malaria each year declined by 85% from 2003 till 2008 and at the same time mean haemoglobin levels increased from 8 to 10 g/dL. Brilliant! Nationwide a decline in children under 5 dying has been seen – the drop in malaria is probably the most important point, but we are also seeing a decline in other reasons for these children being admitted – that increase in haemoglobin concentration may lead to the kids just being healthier and less likely to get any disease. Worryingly, scientists at the meeting were not sure why malaria has gone away. There are lots of reasons that are known – insecticide

treated nets and new drugs and changes in rainfall patterns being the principal ones but there was a general feeling that although it may well be due to a combination of these factors there may be other factors that are still not understood. Malaria has not reduced so dramatically everywhere, for example around Lake Victoria there is still plenty. The danger is that if malaria returns, and it has done so before, then there could be a disaster with people having a much reduced immunity to malaria. A group of entomologists and clinical scientists from the meeting have got together to try and work on this problem.

We had a lovely school sailing camp in Tanga with 10 enthusiastic kids going out in Oppies and on various other boats. New skills were gained and more confidence developed. We camped at the club after cooking dampers over a fire on the beach beneath the stars..... I have officially resigned from the school board although there seems no-one to hand over anything to so I still seem to be doing all the work The last few weeks of term flew past and now we're into the holidays – rather long ones this year (nearly 6 weeks) which is challenging – today we started the Normans – going to re-fight the battle of Hastings tomorrow – Ben has got a computer simulated version only when he plays, the Anglo-Saxons keep on winning

The heat has started early this year (it feels like that anyway). What goes with the heat is the lack of water, we haven't yet quite run out but the water only comes every few days and we've only just started December – what February holds we dread to think. The knock on effect of that is on electricity (as most of the power here is HEP). Tanga has already started to have power rationing and we have noticed a distinct drop in reliability. Heat, no water and no power makes for a rather unhappy combo. I've spent the last few days making candles but of course they don't power computers or fans Piran has started to complain that his skin is itchy and his heat rash is back with a vengeance. We will have this now until April. Either things really are worse or more likely we are becoming less tolerant apologies for whinging. We look with envy at your pretty snowy / frosty pics although like our palm trees, sparkly sea and white sand its no doubt not all perfect.

Wishing you all a very Happy Christmas and many blessings into 2011

God bless

Lots of love

Sally Ben Zack Max and Piran



Prayer and Praise

For the successful Hib surveillance and vaccination program

For the decrease in malaria and more knowledge about why

For new knowledge acquired by the CO's to change their practise

For heat, water and power and tolerance to the presence or absence of all three