

NEWS PEACE

Looking back; looking forward: A nurse's point of view

by Carolyn Ramwell, RN, PFP International Medical Educator

It is hard to believe it has been a year since the doors of Mercy James Pediatric Centre and Intensive Care (MJC) were first opened to surgical and intensive care pediatric patients in Blantyre, Malawi. From the start, the nonprofit organization Raising Malawi, in partnership with Professor Eric Borgstein and Ms. Miriam Simbata from Kamuzu College of Nursing, University of Malawi, has been deeply committed to nursing education and training. By prioritizing nursing competency and education to improve patient outcomes, the MJC nurses journey had begun. Before we even had patients, our nursing leaders, Miriam Simbata, Martha Mapunga, Modester Nkhwazier, and Matron Lydia Magombo enlisted multinational nursing educators to start training to care for the sickest children in Malawi.

Together with a team from South Africa, including Tiya Nikoima, the Oslo Project's June Lund, Line Bolgvaag and myself, we created an innovative, fun, supportive educational program to engage the learners using all the senses. Because the unit was not open yet, we learned by lecture, simulation, and assessment of children at the primary hospital, Queen Elizabeth Central. We laughed and learned a great deal of content. Moving into uncharted territory was both exciting and frightening.

Once the MJC doors were opened, it was time to apply our newly-acquired education to caring for our tiny patients. Each month has brought stronger skills and new knowledge. The nurses are continuously supported by Raising Malawi and the Oslo Project nurse Edith Sverre Slaastad, but the real work has been at the bedside, hard-wiring the skills needed to provide complex and safe patient care to our most vulnerable children.

There are moments when we have grieved with our families as they have suffered loss. And there have been many times when we have celebrated healing. It has taken a great deal of time, knowledge, commitment, willingness to change, creativity, kindness, caring and heart. Our nurses possess all these characteristics.



Photo by Desiree Montilla

The biggest challenge has been to have patience. We are building a team from the ground up and we all have to walk before we can run. In terms of nursing education and training, it takes time, patient volume, and teamwork to become competent.

Moving into our second year, as nurses, we are taking ownership of our nursing practice. As a member of collaborative practice teams, with Martha and Lydia as our leaders, we are all engaged in making a difference in our care. We are included in, or initiate, practice changes, protocols, and commodity management.

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Looking back makes us proud of how far we have come! And looking forward is exciting as well! We could not have arrived here today as nurses without the support for nursing education.

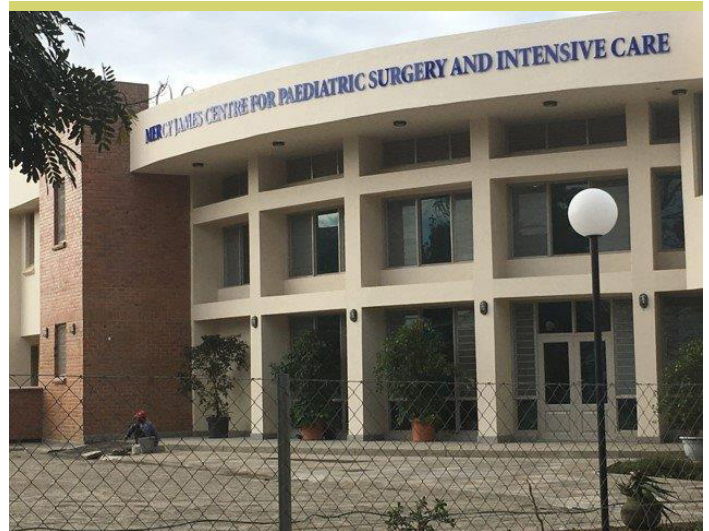
Our team is now complemented by beginning, intermediate and expert nurses. We mentor and support each other. Our commitment to excellence is to our patients and families who trust us with their most valuable possession, their children. Malawi is the warm heart of Africa and MJC nurses are the warm heart of nursing. I am proud and privileged to work with such amazing committed nurses.

Sincerely,
Carolyn





Miriam Simbata, BSN, Kamuzu College of Nursing, University of Malawi, and Carolyn Ramwell, RN, PFP medical volunteer at the Mercy James Centre in Blantyre.



Mercy James Pediatric Centre for Intensive Care, Blantyre, Malawi



It takes a village to build surgical capacity so thousands of people, who simply would not otherwise have access to surgical care, can receive it. PFP partners and collaborators from MJC, the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital in Capetown SA, Raising Malawi and the University of Oslo Hospital.



PFP volunteer, Carolyn Ramwell, (center), teaching PALS to the nursing staff @ MJC.