

Hoima Diary: 21-28 March 2015

Dr Keith D Thomson
MB BS, DRCOG, FRCA

Day 1 – Good start to the trip when I was upgraded to Club Class at check-in. During the flight I chatted to a charming UK lawyer. She was accompanying some company employees on a CSR trip to see what Comic Relief were doing with money they had raised for a project in Uganda. After minimal hassles at Entebbe Airport including just bypassing the X-ray machine, my colleague Duncan and I ate our pre-ordered supper at the *Boma* Hotel and then went to our rooms but sleep was interrupted by a dramatic two hour storm, the first much needed rain for many weeks.

Day 2 – This was spent relaxing beside the hotel pool awaiting the arrival of Americans Terry and Kelly from Rwanda where they had been attending the graduation ceremony at a school supported by their charitable foundation.

Day 3 – I met an English couple (psychiatrist Dave + UCH-based neonatologist Cally Tann). She was involved in a research project on new born babies, in collaboration with UCH (London), at Mulago Hospital. In the past they had spent two years in Uganda, She was also a UK – Uganda hub monitor and had a daughter called Isla, the same name as my 21 month old granddaughter.

We travelled to Hoima after changing money in an Entebbe shopping centre



(security was tight? – fig 1), stopping at a coffee shop in Kampala and visiting the *Banana boat* boutique.

Three hours later our driver, Haruna, delivered us safely at the *Crown* Hotel.

Long drives on African roads in old minivans with no seatbelts is one of the more dangerous aspects of my African Adventures. Before supper I went for a jog followed by a swim in the hotel pool, afterwards I edited an essay for my Sierra Leonean friend, Catherine Conteh, who qualified as an RGN in Australia last year (fig 2).



In 1993 I paid for her to have a caesarean section in a Freetown hospital to save her life; the 'baby' is now a 3rd year student nurse. I had a disturbed night – loud disco music followed by someone in the room above *facetimeing* at the top of their voice and then another rainstorm.

Day 4 – In the morning I visited HRRH (Hoima Regional Referral Hospital) and was delighted to meet my old friend Eunice the senior anaesthetic nurse and her two colleagues waiting to begin the 1st case, also the Consultant Obstetrician Dr Kasujja (fig 3) who was in fine form



although she said that it was not good for an old woman to still do night duty. Sometime later I was pleased to see both the *Glostavent* (GV) anaesthetic machine and a *Lifebox* pulse oximeter being used (fig 4).



These are two pieces of equipment that I feel really do make a significant difference to the safety of anaesthesia provision in an increasing number of African operating theatres.

Eunice had enjoyed attending a SAFE paediatric anaesthesia course in January in Masaka and was now being retested on neonatal resuscitation skills and MCQ by former faculty members Dr Andy (Paediatrician) and Dr Leslie (Anaesthetist) from the UK (fig 5). They were based in Fort Portal



but travelling travelling round the country doing a follow up on all delegates who had attended the course –

Hoima Diary: 21-28 March 2015

Eunice apparently did well and was the only person so far who had kept a logbook. I discussed the possibility of her coming to the UK later in the year to train at the *Diamedica* factory in Barnstaple on how to service and fix the GV.

I then went to the management offices which still had an old disused anaesthesia machine parked outside



(fig 6), Hospital Director Dr Francis Mulwany was busy but I left a *Lifebox* pulseoximeter with him to deliver to a VVF surgeon friend, Dr Stephen, in Kampala. I discussed with his deputy Mr Salim the possibility of Eunice visiting the UK for up to 10 days – he seemed happy as long as the hospital was not responsible for any funding.

The new hospital building works had dramatically progressed since my last visit eight months before but there is still much to be done before the new Maternity Unit, Operating Theatre



block (fig 7) and Management offices (fig 8) will be complete.



Hopefully the new buildings will be complimented by an improvement in staffing levels. For example, there are still only three anaesthetic nurses to cover the whole hospital and one of them does not do night duty because of childcare commitments.

I returned to theatres where Eunice was keen that I helped anaesthetise a child with intestinal obstruction seven days after repair of an intussusception. I had not given an anaesthetic for six months so I managed to decline but kept in touch by phone, the operation finished successfully 40 min later.

That afternoon 35-year-old Specioza and her two children Edward (10) and Winifred (7) came to see me (fig 9).



Eight months before I had noticed her in a church choir one Sunday morning. She had an obvious ameloblastoma (benign tumour) of the mandible (fig 10) which she told me she had suffered from for eight years.



During visits to the Mercy Ships (www.mercyships.org) in West Africa over the past 24 years I had seen many similar cases. I arranged for her to be seen by a surgeon at Corsu Hospital four days later as I was passing near the hospital in a taxi en route to Entebbe Airport for my return flight.

Three months later she underwent a resection and reconstruction with titanium plates and a fibula free flap. After she returned three weeks later to Hoima the staff at the Crown Hotel were very supportive particularly the manager Bosco and the Chief Cashier Jane who had the family to stay in her house for more than two months. Poor Bosco had been suffering from toothache for some weeks. Apparently there are no reputable dentists in Hoima. I am trying to help him find someone suitable in Kampala.

Day 5 – I did a spinal for a caesarean at HRRH then went to the Azur clinic with Eunice to do another two – the first was done by Eunice while I visited the nearby Duhaga Secondary School (DSS) to discuss with headmaster Paul (fig 11) about



my giving a presentation to some of the 600 pupils and also the feasibility of setting up a link with Glenalmond College, my former school in Scotland. Back at Azur the second C/S was much more challenging. My spinal was effective but during the delivery (her 4th) she sustained a posterior uterine rupture and lost a significant amount of blood. We gave her syntocinon, ergometrine (after which she vomited – not a time to discover there was no working suction), and two units of whole blood which materialised remarkably in only about 45 minutes. Luckily my personal supply of emergency drugs included tranexamic acid, one gram of which seemed to have a dramatic effect in reducing the bleeding. I had to give her two bolus doses of ketamine (20mg) once the spinal became less effective.

Hoima Diary: 21-28 March 2015



Fig 12. Eunice with abandoned baby at Azur

After leaving the patient awake and stable in 'recovery' Eunice, (pictured in fig 12 with a baby recently abandoned by her seriously psychiatrically disturbed mother) and I walked back to HRRH, stopping on the way to visit her cousin, sister (fig 13) and



Fig 13. Eunice and her sister

daughter (fig 14) at their places of work.



Fig 14. Eunice + daughter

Dinner that night was at the *Natal* Indian restaurant (fig 15) with the



Fig 15. Natal Indian restaurant

Liverpool Mulago Partnership doctors, working at HRRH, Mark and Claire + their visiting friends Lesley and Andy also with a UK-educated Ugandan businessman called Colin, with his wife.

Paediatrician Mark seemed delighted with all the equipment I had brought with me from the UK. He and his Obstetrician wife, Claire, were also pleased with their newly built accommodation.

Day 6 – At 10 am I met senior tutor Julius at the Hoima School of Nursing to arrange lectures for the students later in the day. We discussed the importance of education and he told me he tells young people 'your things can be stolen but not your knowledge – so get educated'. I then returned to the Crown Hotel where I had arranged to meet Specioza to visit her children's school. The projected 1½ km walk took almost an hour and was nearer 5km. On the way we passed a turkey salesman on his mobile (fig 16) and also the 'God is



Fig 16. Turkeyman on his mobile

good' grinding mill (fig 17).

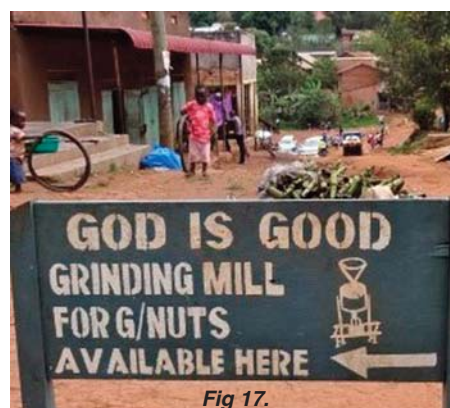


Fig 17.

Beatrice, the deputy head of girls at St Bernadetta's told me there were 36 staff for 1490 pupils, 300 of which were boarders.

The cost of boarding was just under £100/term/child which included almost everything except bedding and mosquito nets. I made the decision to support Specioza's wish for Winifred and Edward to start boarding at the beginning of the next term, the 15th May. For the return journey to the hotel I decided to risk the local system of public transport and share a 'Boda'(motor bike taxi) with Specioza. Our young driver Godfrey (fig 18) was very competent and obeyed my request not to drive too fast.

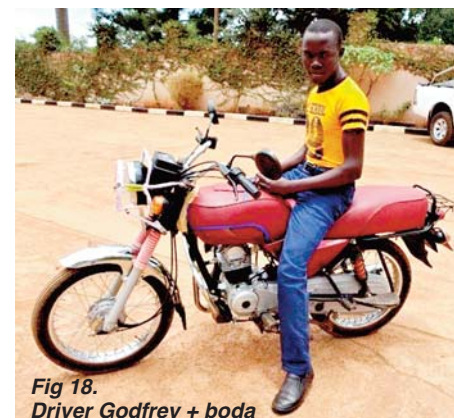


Fig 18. Driver Godfrey + boda

That afternoon after initial generator problems had been sorted (fig 19)

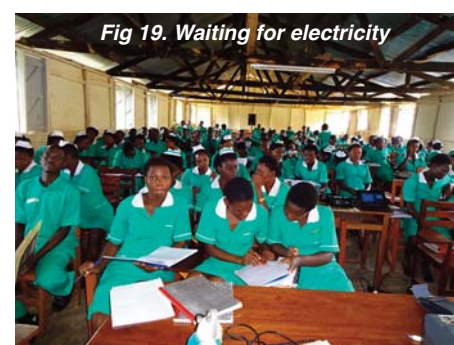


Fig 19. Waiting for electricity

I gave lectures to about 120 student nurses on *Post-operative recovery and my Adventures in Africa*. I tried to project the newly made (in Rwanda) video on Safer Surgery but the light green colour did not show with the ambient natural light. That evening with Claire, Mark and about 10 locals I participated in the weekly local 'Hash' – it was quite a hard course of about 8K with some challenging hills but we stopped twice for exercises which were copied enthusiastically by some of the local children – the good thing was that 'this old man' was not left behind! Back at the hotel over a beer I copied my collection of 49 African documentaries onto Mark's laptop.

Hoima Diary: 21-28 March 2015

Day 7 – This began with pancakes for breakfast at the house of long term missionary Thad Cox. I was then privileged to visit the home of anaesthetic nurse, Eunice, and was surprised to find enlarged framed photos of me and granddaughter Isla on the sitting room wall.



Fig 20. Eunice + Fred

She and her husband Fred (fig 20), a nephew of the King of Bunyoro, owned a significant amount of land with fruit plantations including banana, avocado and bread fruit (fig 21) which I was delighted to sample.



Fig 21. Breadfruit

I was introduced to various family members including Eunice's 88yr old mum (fig 22), sister and paternal



Fig 22. With Eunice's Mum

grandmother who were working in the fields and also various family pets (figs 23, 24).



Fig 23. Pet pig



Fig 24. Puppies

That afternoon I eventually gave a lecture at Duhaga Secondary School to 350 pupils on my African Adventures. On a tree adjacent to the drive was some interesting advice for the students (fig 25)!



Fig 25. Notice on tree

The proposed 3pm start was delayed firstly by my being collected from the hotel 35 min late and then power problems (solved by multiple adaptors and a working generator). This was followed by a non-functional microphone and heavy rain drops on a metal roof making such a noise that my rather weak voice was totally drowned out. Schoolmaster Ambrose helped by being my interpreter until at last a working microphone materialised. The talk, followed by the 2013 CBS 60 Minutes documentary on the Mercy Ships, seemed well received by the audience. Luckily I had brought all my own equipment including a projector, laptop, surge protector/extension lead, slide changer and Bose speaker.

Ambrose's suggestion of putting the microphone beside the latter for the film worked really well. Then it was back to the hotel, a final good bye to Specioza and out to dinner at the *Glory Summit Hotel* with Duncan, Terry and Kelly. I enjoyed excellent tomato soup with croutons followed by perfectly cooked fish but for Terry his carnivore choices were limited as there was no pizza, no beef, and the boneless fried chicken he eventually opted for was not to his taste even with assistance from the local interestingly named sauce (fig 26).



Fig 26. Chilly willy sauce

A local pastor friend arrived who bemoaned the higher (8.1%) than national average level of HIV among his congregants – he commented that people come to church but don't act like Christians should in their personal lives. After supper we returned to the hotel to be greeted by a power failure which lasted all night. Luckily I had already packed for the following morning's trip to Kampala.

Day 8 – After my usual 7am swim in the hotel pool (fig 27) we departed



Fig 27. Crown Hotel pool

by minivan for Kampala. During the journey I watched several 30 min African documentaries on my laptop covering disturbing topics which included child sacrifice in Uganda,

Hoima Diary: 21-28 March 2015

Nigerian women travelling to Italy to become prostitutes and the sexual abuse of young girls in Liberia.

After a visit to the craft market and lunch at *Café pap* in Garden City we arrived at the Boma Hotel in Entebbe where we spent the afternoon by the pool or in my case snoozing in a room I rented until it was time to go to the airport. Terry enjoyed one of the best chicken curries he had ever had which perhaps compensated for his dinner the night before in Hoima.

Our flight back to London was uneventful and on time although the E- boarding card printed from the hotel computer said the flight departed at 0230 when in reality it was an hour earlier – I hope that no one missed the plane.

Summary

It had been a successful week, visiting old friends such as the kindly Eunice who is probably the best anaesthetic nurse I have met anywhere in Africa. It was good to see how well Specioza was doing after her jaw surgery and a privilege to be able to help her and her children perhaps have a better future, the key to which is supporting their education. Hopefully others may be destined to assist other street children (fig 28);



Fig 28. Cheerful kids

a notice I once read on the wall of a school for refugees in Conakry, Guinea, stated 'if you think education is expensive, try ignorance'.

The presentations at DSS and the School of Nursing about my experiences on board the Mercy Ships seemed to be well received – I informed them that Ugandan surgeon Dr Robert Olupot, whom I met 3 years ago at HRRH had already served twice on board the *Africa Mercy* and VVF surgeon Dr Stephen Bawakanya whom I saw operating at HRRH during my previous visit has applied to work on board the *Africa Mercy* in Madagascar.

