

“HEAL Africa and MGH/Harvard an Easter Story of New Life and Hope in Goma”

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has one of the highest perinatal mortality rates (babies who die in the first week of life) in the world, in part due to the distance expectant mothers have to travel to find a hospital, and just as significant, the inability of many hospitals in this part of the world to provide essential support to newborns in respiratory distress, the number one cause of death of newborns here in eastern DRC.

When Ann and I were working in South Sudan several years ago, we became acquainted with a group from MGH/Harvard University who had perfected a low cost and practical tool (uterine balloon) to save the lives of mothers dying from loss of blood after delivery and we integrated that technology into our work with hospitals in the interior of South Sudan. The same team now working as ‘Vayu Global Initiative’ in Massachusetts developed a similar appropriate technology, Bubble CPAP System’ (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure) to save babies dying from respiratory distress. As it turned out, they were seeking partners in Africa to extend this life-saving initiative. I had not been in touch with them in years; we were in Goma, a dangerous city in Congo, and they in Boston. How could we interest them in our hospital (HEAL Africa) especially at a time like this? What seemed impossible for us at the time, wasn’t for God.

We reached out to them several weeks ago, not long after the devastating attack on the city of Goma which left thousands of dead and our hospital overwhelmed, not the best time to ask anyone to come to eastern Congo...but it didn’t seem to sway the team from Vayu. “Sure, I think we can do that”, responded Dr Thomas Burke, the Director of the MGH/Harvard program in Boston. “In fact, two of our doctors are on assignment in East Africa; let me see if they are able to cross into the Congo and get this set up for you...



...and by the way, we can probably give you 8-10 of these new ventilators if HEAL Africa can in turn train other referral centers in your areas to use them.”

The team arrived last week just before Easter and spent six days with our doctors and nurses: three days of training, a day to set up the equipment, and two days of monitoring. On Easter Monday as they were getting ready to depart Congo and travel back to Kenya, a premature baby was delivered at HEAL Africa with challenges breathing. As the baby’s color was fading (and the VAYU team was packing their suitcases) the HEAL Africa delivery nurses rushed the child into the neonatal intensive care unit and put her on the new ‘breathing machine.’ The response was immediate...color and tone improved, respiratory rate came down, and the baby’s oxygen level markedly improved.

A now healthy baby ...and a technology that will be shared and used in one of the poorest and fragile settings in the world. God made use of relationships, connectivity, and commitment to bring a child from the throws of death back to life. A post-resurrection Easter Monday miracle...one of many we witness, acknowledge and give praise to in this part of the world!



You are the God who works wonders! Psalm 77:14

Bill and Ann Clemmer
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