

UGANDA CHILDBIRTH INJURY FUND

NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2021



A charity to cure by surgery women made incontinent through complications in childbirth and other surgical procedures. Please visit our website: ucif.co.uk

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Dear Supporters and friends.

It has been a difficult year for all of us around the world with the ongoing Covid pandemic. The good news is that despite the challenges, we have been able to continue to run fistula camps this year with more than 200 women operated on. Two camps were run independently by our Ugandan colleagues with sponsorship from UCIF. This of course is our long-term objective.

Members of our UK team were largely grounded but our lead nurse Ishbel Campbell overcame all the obstacles to join the Ugandan team at Kamuli in March. Our thanks are due to Dr Ian Asiimwe a leading National surgeon, who took care of all her travel arrangement. Kamuli is a special place for us since we first started our regular visits in 2000.

It is easy to think our camps are all about the surgery, but a good operation can be ruined by poor nursing after care. We are delighted that Ishbel has published a book on Nursing care for Obstetric Fistula co-authored by Ian.

This was jointly sponsored by UCIF and FIGO (Federation National of Gynaecology and Obstetrics) and it has been distributed to the 66 surgeons in 44 countries who are undertaking FIGO sponsored fistula repair training. It is due to be translated into French and Portuguese. The training of fistula care nurses is therefore now a large part of our remit and Ishbel is working with two of our Kamuli nurses to become trainers themselves. The emphasis is on holistic care as understanding the emotional and physical trauma that our women have suffered is so important. It is such a joy to see their response to being dry again, but there is a need to prepare them for the journey of re-integration into their community and to encourage them to become fistula ambassadors. They can spread the word that fistula can be prevented (if money, means and access to functioning obstetric services are available) and

that the majority can be cured by skilled surgery. We still see patients who have been incontinent for years hiding in a remote village believing there was no cure.

The bad news is that we are finding more sufferers than before and many of these are undoubtedly as a result of Covid restrictions impeding access to antenatal and emergency obstetric services. As an example, our UK team were all set to join Ian for a camp in Kamuli in June. All the patients had been mobilised and waiting for us when severe local lockdown restriction put a last-minute stop to the camps.



Figure 1 Ishbel Campbell and Dr Ian Asiimwe with trainee fistula nurses with their new fistula nursing books at Kagadi Hospital

Fortunately, as things eased, we were able in October to join our Ugandan friends for a three-week session visiting three hospitals, two of them new to us. Ishbel came with her books and Mhairi Collie, our lead UCIF surgeon, was delighted to be back operating again. The camp at Kamuli went smoothly as they are well accustomed to our visits but the camps at Kagadi and Kyangwali posed new challenges.

At Kagadi we purchased a new operating table so that emergency Caesarean sections would not interrupt our fistula surgery. Kyangwali is a small hospital in the west that serves a resettlement town for 120,000 refugees, mostly from Congo and Sudan. There were plenty of patients waiting, beds were crammed together, so we have donated a large semi-permanent tent as extra ward

space. Ishbel was pleased to see how quickly the nurses, all new to fistula care, became proficient. We plan further visits next year.



Figure 2 UCIF team with staff from Kyangwali hospital

Just to summarize, our team sponsored 234 operations approximately 40% Bladder fistulas 40% Anal sphincter repairs and 20% miscellaneous bowel or bladder operation. A remarkable achievement. As always, we had a very good attendance of African surgeons wishing to learn the craft of fistula repair from Mhairi and Ian, eight from Uganda, and specialists from Congo, Kenya and Somaliland.

We hope that our work will not be restricted in 2022 as we have plans for up to eight camps four by Ian and his local team and four bringing back the full international team of surgeons Mhairi, and Kate Darlow, from Scotland and Cathrine Reimers from Norway and midwife Christine Wood as well as Ishbel.

We have great news from the home front in that our chairman and surgeon Mhairi Collie has been awarded an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours list 2021 for services to medicine. She eagerly awaits her trip to the Palace to accept her well-deserved award. She wishes to share this award with all the UCIF team and especially our Uganda colleagues who are so vital to the success of our work.



Figure 3 International team of surgeons

Thank you all so much for your continued interest and support, without your help we could not achieve all this life changing surgery. The smile from a cured patient says it all.

Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.
Love Brian, Mhairi, Kate, Ishbel, Christine, Sarah and Brenda
XXX

Trustees: Brian Hancock, Mhairi Collie, Kate Darlow, Ishbel Campbell, Christine Wood, Sarah Fraser, Brenda Gray.

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