

HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PAEDIATRICS AND CHILD HEALTH

1. INTRODUCTION

This history was written by Prof Nimrod Bwibo at the request of Prof. Elizabeth Obimbo, the Chairperson of the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health. In doing so, he relied on his long stay in this Department, the School of Medicine and the College of Health Sciences. His personal input is also reflected as he had opportunity to serve as:-

- Chairman of the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health
- Dean of the Faculty of Medicine
- Founder Principal of the College of Health Sciences

2. INITIATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PAEDIATRICS AND CHILD HEALTH

The Department of Paediatrics and Child Health was one of the initial nine Departments that were started in the Faculty of Medicine, as was known then. These nine Departments were: Department of Human Anatomy, Department of Physiology, and Department of Biochemistry as the three Pre-clinical Departments while the six Clinical Departments were: Department of Pathology, Department of Community Health, Department of Paediatrics and Child Health, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Department of Medicine and Surgery.

The Faculty of Medicine was started in 1967. Before then all Kenyan doctors were trained at the Faculty of Medicine of the University College of East Africa, Makerere in Kampala Uganda. Then the number of Kenyan doctors graduating yearly at Makerere was very small - one to three doctors per year. My class was the largest on entry in 1955 with a total of 19 students from East Africa (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania). Six of us were from Kenya.

At that rate of doctors production, Kenya was not graduating enough doctors to cope with rapidly rising population then of 3.4% per annum.

Dr. Njoroge Mungai, the Minister for Medical Services was the pivot in the starting of the Faculty of Medicine and solicited many countries to help the training of Kenyan doctors at the Faculty of Medicine of University of Nairobi.

Many countries responded to the plea to help Kenya start a Medical School.

1. Italy volunteered to start the Department of Human Anatomy.
2. England volunteered to start the Department of Physiology, Biochemistry and Surgery
3. Scotland volunteered to start the Department of Pathology, Community Health, Obstetrics and Gynaecology

4. Canada volunteered to start the Department of Medicine and Department of Paediatrics and Child Health.

The founding staff of the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health came from Mc Gill University Canada. They were six namely: Prof. Allan Ross as the Chairman of the Department and Prof. Donald Hillman and his wife Prof. Elizabeth Hillman, Prof. Donald Clogg, Prof. Forbes and Prof. Leaky.

These had steered the first class 1968/69 till April 1971 when I joined them from the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health of University of East Africa Makerere as Senior Lecturer. This first class of twenty paediatric students did their final examination in August to which I participated as an examiner. The few names of that class that I remember are: Miriam Were, Cyrus Kungu and Julius Meme. Two of us Kenyan doctors were teaching at Makerere Medical School; Dr. Joseph Maina Mungai as Senior Lecturer in Human Anatomy and I, a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health. We were both recalled to come home and teach at the new Medical School of University of Nairobi. Dr. Mungai moved earlier in 1968 and I moved in April 1971. I was well received by the Canadian team in the Department and begun working with them effectively in lectures, wards and clinics.

Any of the staff who was on call had to remain in the hospital till 8.00 pm reviewing all the new cases. This supported the interns immensely and the work was of high quality. On the ward there was a side laboratory and every student was expected to carry out blood slide and examine for malaria parasites or determine the presence of sickled cell for children diagnosed with sickle cell or blood morphology, determine the presence of microcytes and hypochromic cells in case of iron deficiency anaemia. The students would also do urinalysis and stool examination for intestinal worms. We thus maintained undergraduate teaching to a high standard. The Faculty of Medicine aimed at turning out General Duty Medical Officers who would function independently wherever they were posted as doctors.

In June 1972, I was promoted to the level of Professor of Paediatrics and Child Health. Professor Allan Ross, the Chairman, had six months to go and then return to Canada. He soon relinquished the position of Chairmanship of the Department to me and eventually left six months later.

The running and development of the Department was in my hands and I embarked on effecting changes and bringing development I felt fit. Fortunately, the remaining members of Mc Gill team were very cooperative and supportive.

3. EXPANSION OF THE DEPARTMENT

Since I knew the McGill team would eventually leave, I begun recruiting local Paediatricians to fill their posts. I made them supernumerary which gave me chance to fill their positions with local staff. The local staff I recruited were: Dr. Parkar, Dr. Sam Ongeru, Dr. Daniel Njai and Dr. Ali Montet.

I strengthened the relationship between my academic staff and the Kenyatta Hospital Paediatric Consultants who included: Dr. Martin Luther Oduori who was the Government Chief Paediatrician and Head of the Kenyatta Hospital team. The other members of his staff were; Dr. Kimemia and Dr. Peter Muiva. In so doing I achieved a National look of the Department.

4. DEVELOPING INTERNATIONAL LOOK

My next step was to make the Department have an international look by recruiting other international Professors apart from the Canadian Professors. In this regard, I recruited Dr. Judith Brown as Senior Lecturer from London and Professor Sinnette from University of Washington D.C, then Dr. Allan Cross from University of North Carolina in USA, Dr. Rachel Musoke from Uganda and Dr. Mohan Lumba from India as Lecturers.

I established linkages of my Department with other University Departments. The first linkage was with University of California USA where I did my Postgraduate studies. My teachers from School of Public Health Berkeley were first to arrive and we set up research station on Nutrition in Embu. To this team, a team from University of California Los Angeles, joined and one of them Professor Neuman is still connected to the Department till now.

The next linkage was with University of Lagos from where visiting Professors provided short teaching visits at Our Department and I would be an external examiner at their Department of Paediatrics. The next linkage was with University of Ghana from where Professor Krumer came to spend two years in our Department.

I then turned to UK and established linkage with University of Liverpool, London and Edniburgh. From these Universities the Department received visiting Professors on various short visits benefiting from their lectures and various talks. I also visited their Departments as a visiting Professor. My final linkages were directed to Indian Universities where I had Professors from new Delhi, Bombay and Madras. I also visited their Universities. Apart from West African Universities, I also developed linkages with the University of Ethiopia and University of Sudan.

Besides receiving Professors, I had open door for elective students from USA, Canada, France, German, Finland and Denmark. It was during vibrant exchanges that I recruited Paediatric Surgeon from Finland who spend two years with us and when he left I recruited Prof. Kyambi from German. These two helped set up a separate Paediatric Surgery Unit within the Department of Surgery. Efforts to train Dr. John Alwar as Paediatric Surgeon failed. John remained as a Lecturer in Paediatrics till he resigned to set up a private practice.

5. INCOMING OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

In March 1973, I was elected to Deanship of the Faculty of Medicine and continued running of the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health. About June of the same

year, the then Minister of Health Hon. Omolo Okero gave a press speech at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport on his trip overseas. In the speech, Hon. Omolo Okero directed that Kenya must start immediately the training of Medical Specialists locally at the Faculty of Medicine University of Nairobi. He stressed that Kenya can no longer rely on training enough of its specialist doctors in the UK in view of limited scholarships and the increasing demand.

Training in the UK meant that our doctors spend many years abroad not providing health care to our people. That there was the danger of brain drain, when some of the qualified specialists fail to return after the completion of their training. That local training would be ideal as it will focus on our, relevant health problems. Besides, as they train, the doctor would provide health care to our patients. The directive was loud, clear and authoritative. I had to see to it that it is implemented. I set several strategies for implementation of the directive. This included the following:

- I addressed the Medical Registrars from the four major disciplines of medicine i.e. General Medicine, Surgery, Paediatrics, Obstetrics and Gynaecology about the need for them to be trained locally in their disciplines of specialization according to the directive.
- I briefed the Vice Chancellor Dr. Joseph Karanja and requested for University support in the matter. I convened Faculty Board meeting to discuss way forward. I set up staff steering committee to help me in the exercise. This included the medical librarian.
- I incorporated two student leaders in the steering committee namely Dr. Mohammed Adbullah and Dr. Peter Odhiambo from the disciplines of medicine and surgery respectively. The steering committee made a list of the required text books to be bought and placed in the medical library.
- I consulted Ministry of Health to be prepared to release and fund their doctors for local specialist training at the Faculty of Medicine and to request the Director of Medical Services to serve on the Faculty steering committee.
- I approached British Council to source and provide some of the required text books which they readily agreed and even set up funds to provide specialist books in Provincial Medical Training Colleges (MTC) libraries to be used by the specialist doctors when posted to Provincial Hospitals.
- Finally, the Faculty Board approved the syllabus for local specialists training. Fortunately, there was a syllabus already approved at Makerere University for specialists degree called Masters in Medicine (M. Med) for East Africa. This is the three year syllabus that was approved and come September 1973 Postgraduate training begun in: Paediatrics, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Medicine and Surgery.

The first batch of M. Med Paediatrics and Child Health students were nine which included: Dr. Julius Meme, Dr. Cyrus Kungu, Dr. Peter Muthiga and Dr. Kilonzo.

I set myself to provide what was required for Paediatrics studies. I approached British Council who donated several required text books which I stocked in the main library. I

requested UNICEF to provide Nursery Incubators at the teaching Hospital, to enhance teaching of Newborn which Dr. Martin Oduor and I were the head teachers.

6. COMPETATIVE ADMISSION OF M. MED STUDENTS

Although we begun with nine students, the yearly intake begun to rise sharply. We had to respond to applicants wishes. At the intake interviews, I would select the number we needed and persuade other applicants to apply for other M. Med programmes next time. However, many of the applicants preferred to wait for the following years and try their luck. One such example is Dr. James Nyikal who tried again until I was impressed that he wanted to be a Paediatrician. I responded to such a genuine need by reserving a place for him after I visited him on my Provincial visits when he was a Medical Officer at Homa Bay District Hospital. On that day of my visit, we conducted a Paediatrics ward round together and I was truly impressed that he loved Paediatrics. After the ward round as we were having tea, I told him “James I will reserve a place for you next year”. Come the following year, he came for interview just as a formality.

7. FOREIGN M. MED STUDENTS

As the M. Med Programme grew from strength to strength, foreign student applicants started coming in, starting from near home, we had two lady doctors from Uganda admitted and one male applicant from Tanzania. These were followed by a gentleman from Cameroon, another gentleman from Sudan, then another from Zimbabwe and a lady from Zambia. The interest shown by these foreign students to our M. Med Programme continues to these days where we have foreign students in every year. To us this is a success story that has made our M. Med training programme of International Standard.

8. PAEDIATRICS M.MED PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTION TO IMPROVED PAEDIATRIC HEALTH CARE IN THE PROVINCIAL HOSPITALS

In May 1975, I relinquished the post of the Dean to Professor Thairu and hence dedicated my full time service to the development of the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health. I had in mind that the M. Med students should have wider clinical exposure other than centering their training at the Kenyatta National Hospital, the teaching hospital. I requested UNICEF to provide the Department with two vehicles which the staff would use to visit and supervise the students on rotation at the Provincial Hospitals. These two vehicles I received promptly. The vehicles served us well. Students would be posted to Provincial Hospitals for one month's rotation. While there the academic members of staff would visit them. The staff would stay in the Provincial Hospital and the underlying Health Centres teaching all the health staff in Paediatrics wards and clinics.

The staff enjoyed those visits which gave them opportunity to see Kenya, other than Nairobi. Dr. Judith Brown was particularly keen to visit Garissa and Nyeri. Garissa Provincial Hospital was then the only Provincial Hospital with a Paediatrician from

England. I was in-charge of visits to Western zone: Nakuru, Kisumu and Kakamega. Since the programme was exciting, the staff kept it active by frequent visits.

Our presence in the Provincial Hospitals greatly improved the standard of health care of paediatric patients in the provincial hospitals. The exercise was planned to help new M. Med Paediatrics find good working environment when posted there on the completion of their training.

While on their Provincial rotations, the M. Med students were instructed to enforce the idea of mothers getting involved in the health care of their hospitalized children. The mothers were encouraged by M. Med students to keep hospital wards clean, feed their children, administer medicine to the children etc. This active role in the ward work made the mothers active, alert and happy.

To encourage the students, I went round the Provincial Hospitals to rank the mothers participation in ward work and found Mombasa top. Dr. Vincent Orinda was there. Not only did I reward him but I reserved a lecturer post which he occupied after his training and then I supported him for UNICEF post.

To improve health care in the Provincial Hospitals, I requested UNICEF to donate incubators to the Provincial Hospitals for M. Med students to use for the care of neonates. UNICEF readily accepted and donated two incubators to all the Provincial Hospitals. Impressed with our oversight, UNICEF staff on visiting Taita Taveta District Hospital found it to be in a very cold area and on her initiative recommended to UNICEF to donate two incubators to the hospital. To appreciate her concern, Paediatrics members of staff would visit Taita Taveta Hospital regularly to supervise the use of those incubators on their way to or from Mombasa Provincial Hospital.

In the course of regular visits to the Provincial Hospitals, I realized there were no hospital libraries apart from Nakuru which was being used by Medical Training College (MTC) for the teaching of their clinical and nursing students. In this regard, I thought that every Provincial Hospital should have a reference library. I requested British Council to help in that exercise and they gladly accepted to do so. Their first response was to Kakamega Provincial Hospital where a room was set aside and they donated medical and nursing books where they were kept. Dr. Peter Muthiga who was the first Provincial Paediatrician to be posted to Kakamega greatly improved on this library which was valuable to MTC when it set up training there.

9. M. MED PAEDIATRIC SPECIALISTS BECOME ACADEMIC STAFF MEMBERS IN THE DEPARTMENT

This indeed was a success story; rather than the Department recruiting lecturers from elsewhere, its M. Med products became available to be considered for academic posts in the Department. From the first batch of M. Med graduants two were recruited lecturers named: Dr. Julius Meme and Dr. Cyrus Kungu. These were eventually

followed by many others such as Dr. Francis Onyango, Dr. Aggrey Wasunna, Dr. Ezekiel Wafula, Dr. Vincent Orinda, Dr. William Macharia, Dr. Esile Simiyu, Dr. Dorothy Ngacha, Dr. Ruth Nduati, Dr. Elizabeth Obimbo, Dr. Florence Murila and Dr. Dalton Wamalwa. Currently the Department has twenty three (23) academic members of staff composed of six (6) Professors, three (3) Associate Professors, Five (5) Senior Lecturers, eight (8) Lecturers and one (1) Tutorial Fellow. The majority of these are M. Med graduants of the Department.

10. DEPARTMENTAL PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL ACTIVITIES

From early on, the Department has actively participated in Government activities. It has produced many Paediatricians who are serving in Public Health Service as well as Private Health Service in the country. In a way answering effectively what Hon. Omolo Okero, the then Minister for Health, directed that local training of specialists doctors was required to serve the growing Kenyan population.

The Paediatricians from the Department M. Med Programme have even served in senior administrative levels of the Ministry of Health as Directors of Medical Services. M. Med graduants who served at that level are Prof. Julius Meme, Dr. Muga and Dr. James Nyikal. Two of these moved up the rank to serve as Permanent Secretaries in the same Ministry while Dr. Muga moved up the ladder in a different area of Government administration. Currently, three Departmental senior staff were appointed to chair National Committees. Prof. Nimrod Bwibo is the Chairman of National Polio Certification Committee (NPCC) while Prof. Ezekiel Wafula is the Chairman of the National Polio Expert Committee (NPEC). The two committees are heading the strategies of elimination of polio in Kenya which is World Health Organization world wide mandate to remove polio out the surface of the world. Dr. Daniel Njai is the chairman of the National Measles Committee. It is pride to add on that Professor Ruth Nduati functions at international level on this activity of polio eradication where she serves as a WHO member of overseeing committee on polio eradication activities.

While still on national activities, as the Chairman of the Department and a senior doctor, I was appointed by the office of the President to write the history of medical services of the Republic of Kenya which was printed in National book as a chapter when the country was celebrating the fifth year of independence. At that year's celebration ceremony I, Nimrod Odundo Bwibo, received a national award of Order of Elder of Burning Spear (EBS).

11. DEPARTMENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMES

The Department has had an international look by participating in UN programmes and projects. For instance, for UNICEF, the Chairman of the Department was appointed to serve as Chairman of Child Survival and Development (CSD) project whose aim was to focus on improvement of child health services so as to improve child survival. This was as a result of the high under five and infant mortality rates in children in the developing

countries. The programme was an East African one where the Chairmen of Departments of Paediatrics of Makerere Medical School, Dar es Salaam Medical School and Nairobi Medical School were involved.

The Kenya programme based its activities in Baringo District where we focused on improving nutrition in the under fives. Kenya programme involved academic staff from Nairobi University, Kenyatta University and Moi University Departments of Nutrition. This programme received funding from Finland. Italy joined in the funding later on and provided a Mobile Hospital in the form of a huge vehicle which is now under utilized and is parked at the Main Campus near the University Main Library.

There was also a WHO project which was on Adolescent Health. This was centered in Kenya with active participation of the Department of Paediatrics and Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. For this project, I got direct funding from WHO General where the regional leaders would meet yearly to discuss and report on the progress made. Prof. Mati of Obstetrics and Gynaecology helped us to focus on adolescent pregnancies in Kenya and how to advocate on their reduction otherwise, nutrition in general health care were the main focus.

The other activity of international outlook is the Global Life Stock Research Project which was followed by USA sponsored school feeding nutrition project. The two projects had their activities in Egypt, Kenya and Mexico. The Kenyan project was based in the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health. I was the Principal Investigator with my Co-Principal Investigator being Prof. Neumann from University of California Los Angeles. The Kenya Projects were carried out in Embu District. These generated a lot of research results which we published world wide in Nutrition Journals and Conferences.

In the 70's and 80's, the Department was involved in the International Paediatrics Association (IPA) where its Chairman was a committee member representing Africa. This gave the Chairman opportunity to attend IPA Conferences in New Delhi, Spain, Ankara, Netherlands, France and Nigeria and help organize the IPA conference in Africa in Cairo, Egypt and IPA seminar on Nutrition in Nairobi, Kenya where I took members of the committee to visit the then President of the republic of Kenya, Mr. D. Moi at State House Nairobi.

The Department got involved yet again in an international outlook project. This time it was a Common Wealth initiated and sponsored project aimed at prevention of mental retardation within the chosen common wealth countries. This initiative was called Common Wealth Association for prevention of Mental retarded and Disability, abbreviated as CAMHAD. I, from the Department of Paediatrics University of Nairobi was chosen the Chairman and Dr. Pandurangi from University of New Delhi as the Secretary General with other members selected from India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Ghana and Malawi. The activities of the project were centered in North, Central and Southern India, Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Sey Chelles. All these activities uplifted the name of the Department which has remained high up internationally.

These have been followed by current involvement of the Departmental academic staff in various international projects on HIV/AIDs run by academic staff: Prof. Ruth Nduati, prof Dorothy Mbori-Ngacha, Prof. Elizabeth Obimbo and Dr. Dalton Wamalwa. These new projects have led into development of more Departmental offices and research laboratories which stand magnificently at the Medical School.

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