Scottish charity celebrates £1.3 million donation to Malawian Hospital

Friday 29 September, 2023

EMMS International is today celebrating its £1.3 million donation to the Mulanje Mission Hospital in Malawi. The announcement of the total figure comes as its Medical Director, Dr. Arie Glas, visits Edinburgh from Malawi and joins the EMMS International team to commemorate the decades-long partnership.

In the last 10 years alone EMMS International, Scotland's oldest healthcare charity, has supported the Mulanje Mission Hospital to slow the spread of tuberculosis with faster diagnoses, offer clean water to reduce cholera transmission, reach families in rural areas to offer palliative care, and to cut teenage pregnancies in the community. During Cyclone Freddy the hospital's upgraded solar power, which had been installed by EMMS International, meant reduced disruption during the nation-wide blackout.

Dr. Arie Glas and Dr. Lisanne Glas spoke to the West Lothian congregation of Boghall Parish Church at a special event on the evening of 25th September. They shared photographs and a video of the team's work at Mulanje Mission Hospital, with Dr. Arie Glas revealing:

"Malawi is one of the most densely populated African nations, and its population is predicted to 42 million by 2050. Our youth team focuses on the vital prevention of teenage pregnancy, prevention of HIV/AIDS and the development of essential life skills among youth, working closely with local churches, schools and other supportive groups."

The history of the partnership between EMMS International and the Mulanje Mission Hospital goes back to the late 1800s. The first Presbyterian Mission in Malawi was founded by Church of Scotland missionaries in 1876, and 20 years later EMMS student, Neil MacVicar, oversaw the construction of a hospital building in Blantyre. The hospital has been in its current location in Mulanje since 1928.

Today, 84% of Malawi's population live in rural areas. Many families, who are living in poverty, are stranded without ongoing care after a life-limiting diagnosis. Palliative care and pain relief for non-communicable diseases, such as cancer, is out of reach for many people. Take, for example, 37-year-old Millika (not her real name), who lives in Blantyre with her school-aged children. Millika became unwell with a swollen leg and eventually, after several trips to the hospital, was told she had advanced cancer. Soon after she received her diagnosis, her husband left her. Millka couldn't find this money for further hospital visits or medication and instead stayed at home, no longer able to work or walk.

A structure of well-equipped rural health facilities is therefore essential. A £280,000 project called Mokwanira (meaning "thorough" in the Chichewa language) has renovated 5 rural health centres, provided clean water and sanitation, and provided 4 ambulances. A £85,000 project instigated the development of 300 staff-community committees which increased use of healthcare by 300,000 people. A further £210,000 has been spent specifically on palliative care for families living in hard-to-reach areas. EMMS International's CEO and Director of International Programmes, Dr. Cathy Ratcliff, says:

"We are proud to have started palliative care in each of Malawi's 28 districts, which has raised Malawi's integration of palliative care to its health service to be on a par with the UK's. Having quality care at or close to home stops families having to choose between healthcare for their loved ones and education for the next generation."

In all it does, EMMS International is passionate about promoting women's and girls' rights. When schools closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the rate of teenage pregnancies in Malawi doubled. With the support of EMMS International's £61,000 funding, the Mulanje Mission Hospital team is working with village chiefs, faith leaders and families to speak out against harmful cultural practices that lead to early pregnancies, providing safe places for girls and boys to access health services and information on sexual health. During the past year, they have reached 6,044 vulnerable young people.

A key part of the work is to support girls and teenage mothers so that they can stay in school or gain skills through vocational training. EMMS International has developed 2 diploma courses and a BSc course and sponsored 95 vulnerable women through college and into healthcare careers. More than £100,000 has been spent to improve training in palliative care in Malawi.

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EMMS International is poised to do more. The charity exists to improve access to healthcare for people living in poverty and also works with a range of partners in Nepal, India and Scotland. EMMS is a long-term, steady supporter of healthcare in Malawi and is committed to its ongoing partnership with the Mulanje Mission Hospital.

Those who wish to support the charity's work can make a donation here: https://www.emms.org/donate

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