

## Saving Lives in Uganda

Debbie Anzalone, RV, watched as the truck came bouncing down the clay road that penetrates the back country of Uganda. In the back of the truck was precious cargo; two five year-old incubators in perfect condition. They had made the long journey from Children's Hospital to Luwero, a remote region devastated by years of civil war. As they were unloaded from the truck and brought into Kiwoko Hospital's new infant care unit, the excitement of the staff was obvious. With these new incubators, they knew they would save lives. An impromptu ceremony began, with nurses clasping hands in a circle, welcoming the incubators with Ugandan song and giving thanks for their safe arrival.

As Debbie tells the story of the incubators, you can sense her passion. A neonatal ICU nurse originally from Canada, she spends her time either working at Children's or in Africa. For the last two years, she has been the project manager for the Uganda branch of the ISIS Foundation, a non-profit organization based in Bermuda that strives to improve infant health in third-world countries.

When Debbie first stumbled upon Kiwoko a few years ago, she was appalled at what she found. The small hospital had only four doctors on staff, none of whom had pediatric training. Very small babies were being born at the hospital and the infant mortality rate was 122 per 1000 live birth, as compared to 8 per 1000 in the U.S. "I have 13 years critical care experience, and I couldn't believe what I was seeing," she says. "But the staff was incredible - doing the best they could in amazingly difficult situations."

Debbie spends her vacation time in Uganda, teaching neonatal resuscitation. When back in Seattle, she uses her spare time to find medical equipment and other resources for the hospital. With the helped of nurses in Children's ICU, she was able to procure the two incubators through Children's Central Services. "In the past, Kiwoko was a dumping ground for old equipment that didn't work," Debbie says. "Children's is providing newer items, and the staff in Kiwoko are very grateful." [sic] Children's also has supported Debbie's efforts by accommodating her frequent trips to Uganda.

Many of Children's staff are becoming involved. Some plan to take vacation time to work at Kiwoko. Others are helping acquire needed equipment. Even patients want to help. One 13 year-old boy who has undergone over 25 surgeries made it clear to his mother than any of his unused home care equipment should go to Uganda. On the day that his mother learned devastating news about his condition, she still worked overtime to get his suction equipment from Lyndon. WA to Seattle in time for Debbie's recent trip to Uganda.

Debbie has been very moved by the outpouring of help from Children's staff and patients, and points out that they truly are making a difference. The number of infant deaths has decreased since ISIS began its work at Kiwoko, and Children's equipment is being put to good use. "Continuing my work at Children's in conjunction with the Kiwoko Project is a dream come true," says Debbie. "With Children's helping to back this project, the difference we will make in third world Africa will be life over death."

For more information about the Uganda project, please contact Debbie Anzalone at 206-366-0698. More photos are available on CHILD.

-Lisette Austin

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