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Doctors shift from KEMH to Uganda

By Tania Theriault

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Two local professionals are set to travel half way around the globe to pass on medical expertise and training to an African hospital later this month in a bid to save lives in the impoverished region. Radiologist Dr. George McInnes and radiographer Jeff Austin from King Edward VII Memorial Hospital will be spending two weeks at Uganda's Kiwoko Hospital as part of a project sponsored by the *ISIS Foundation*.

ISIS has been involved with Kiwoko Hospital since 1999, foundation General Manager Leonie Exel explained to The Royal Gazette, and both Dr. McInnes and Mr. Austin have volunteered their time

and efforts to assist the cause.

The small, rural Kiwoko hospital is located about an hour and half outside the country's capital of Kampala.

With just seven doctors, the hospital serves a population of 500,000 spread over an area half the size of Northern Ireland.

Last year, *ISIS* helped the hospital establish a neonatal intensive care unit – which has since treated 250 children – and now the charity is focussing in on preventative care through strengthening ultrasound and X-ray technology capacity.

"Last year I approached *ISIS* to see if there was anyway I could be useful," Dr. McInnes said. "Turns out the hospital has a pretty modern, portable ultrasound. While they have the machine, they haven't been using it."

Rather than using the new machine, which was donated by a medical supply company, the hospital has been using an old, fixed ultrasound which also has a shadow on it.

Over the two weeks he spends in Uganda, Dr. McInnes hopes to turn that situation around and empower local doctors to make maximum use of the tools they have at hand.

"I'll be showing them how to use the machine effectively and demonstrating the scope and versatility of the machine," he said. "They don't have either a radiologist or a radiographer at the hospital at the moment. The hope really, is to leave them with some of our skills."

And, more importantly, to save lives in the regions which is plagued by malnutrition, poverty, malaria and high prevalence of HIV infection.

Those living with HIV/AIDS may benefit most directly from the expertise the two KEMH professionals are bringing to the country.

"A lot of patients that the hospital treats have AIDS," Dr. McInnes explained. "And people with AIDS tend to develop abscesses. But an internal radiologist with a few years experience and training can minimise the invasive techniques used to treat these abscesses." Left untreated, abscesses – infection-filled swellings which can occur throughout the body – can cause complications which lead to death, Dr. McInnes said. At the moment, doctors at Kiwoko must resort to surgery to remedy these problems but Dr. McInnes will be demonstrating techniques when abscesses can be identified earlier and drained through less invasive measures.

"We put a tube in through the skin without the patient needing to be opened up," Dr. McInnes said. "If abscesses are not drained the patient would often die because of the overwhelming infection."



"But if we get to the source of the infection first – and it can be in strange places deep in the body – we can save them through minimally invasive techniques."

Because the ultrasound the hospital has acquired is extremely sturdy and portable, it is hoped once the Kiwoko doctors are trained in its proper use, they will be able to expand their services further into the countryside.

"We've been doing a number of things at Kiwoko," added Ms Exel. "Particularly we've been working on primary health care training with mothers and babies. Once we have the capacity to take this ultrasound out into the countryside we'll be able to reach more mothers and identify more potential problems before they occur."

In addition to training medical personnel, Dr. McInnes will be putting training procedures on to CDs so it can continue after his departure and delivering much needed medical supplies which were locally donated through Atlantic Medical International agent Craig Bethune.

"They have very generously given us equipment such as suture, IV cannulae, drips, gloves, masks and ultrasound jelly," Ms Exel said.



Another important project booster has been a group of ACE Limited employees who climbed Mount Kilimanjaro this past June and raised \$300,000 for the charity, which is primarily funded through the insurance and financial consultancy *ISIS Limited* run by Ms Exel's sister Audette and her partner Sharon Beesley.

The two formed the charity after taking a sabbatical from their business careers to travel the world. The experiences of the two executives in the third world

spurred them not only to compassion but also to action.

ISIS Limited now channels profits into six, non-governmental charity organisations in Nepal as well as the Ugandan hospital. Performing a service almost unique in Bermuda, the *ISIS Foundation* has funnelled over \$1 million into its causes since inception four years ago.

In addition to its independently generated funds, *ISIS* receives donations from all corners of the globe.

And the people of Uganda's Luwero district are among those fortunate enough to benefit from the charity's ongoing drive.

The *ISIS* group will be travelling to Kiwoko Hospital on September 21 and a second medical training initiative – in anaesthetics – is planned for December.