

PARTNER PLAN

David & Rebecca Morton - Malawi October 2015

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Dear Family and Friends,

Nkhoma Hospital has yet to receive the funds owed by the government to the hospital for care given to patients under the Service Level Agreement (SLA) from February through June (about Malawi Kwacha 16 million including the health centers also supervised by the hospital). The Ministry of Health has offered no new SLA for the current financial year (beginning July this year). For the sake of the community benefiting from this service, Nkhoma continued providing the services through August, hoping the government would come up with a payment plan and new agreement, but there was no definite response. So after spending another Mk 8 million for those two months, with a debt owed by the government for services already delivered now up to Mk 24 million (about \$45,000 at current exchange rates), the hospital suspended the agreement effective 01 September. This means that although Nkhoma continues to provide the services and remains the referral hospital for the surrounding government health centers, the patients (maternity and children under five), who used to access the services at no charge to them, now have to pay.



We have seen a significant decrease in pregnant women coming to the hospital for the month of September compared to September last year. There has been a 48% decrease in the number of women coming from the SLA catchment area, and a dramatic decrease in cases referred from the health centers (79 referred in September 2014, 5 in September 2015). Cost is definitely a barrier, and we do not know what is happening in the communities in terms of reverting to home deliveries or even home maternal deaths, but hope to be able to get that information.

The day after we stopped the SLA (September 02), a delegation came from the Ministry of Health asking us to immediately resume the SLA, and promising to pay what was owed by the end of the third week of September. The hospital agreed to restart the SLA when 1) what was owed was paid and 2) when the Government offered a new SLA for the new financial year with a realistic reimbursement plan. As of today (the end of the third week of October), nothing has come from the government, so the SLA is still suspended.

Also in the month of September the Malawi kwacha devalued from a rate of 430 to \$1 the end of June to over 560 to \$1, the government withdrew postings to all newly qualified nurses, doctors, pharmacists and physiotherapists who were to report to government or CHAM (Christian Hospital Association of Malawi) health units because of lack of funds to pay them (and remember over 90% of all health care in Malawi is provided by either government or CHAM health facilities), and the IMF declared Malawi to be in default of meeting requirements to continue accessing IMF's extended credit facility, meaning no further loans through IMF to the government. This is on top of EU and North American governments already having suspended all direct assistance to the Malawi government budget in wake of the multiple "cashgates" (unaccounted missing funds from

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government treasury since 2009). To date there appears to be no unified government response to all of these issues, but much finger pointing and political wrangling between governing and opposition political leaders.

Despite all of this, the hospital continues to provide the best services it can. But the financial situation has forced the hospital to reduce staff benefits and reduce some services (reducing the types of laboratory testing available and range of medications in the pharmacy). We do not know how long things will go on like this or what other steps we might need to take. One of the Sunday sermons referred to Habakkuk (3:17-18) to describe the situation and our needed response: "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Saviour."

And yet, we are still in a position to serve our Lord and through the hospital, serve our community with love and care. Recently the National AIDS Commission of Malawi released a report showing the dramatic improvement within Malawi regarding HIV/AIDS. The number of new infections in 2014 (42,000) is less than half that of 2004 (89,000), the year that widespread treatment for HIV became available in Malawi. The number of deaths from AIDS dropped from 66,000 in 2004 to 27,000 in 2014, and over that 10 year span, an estimated 200,000 deaths from AIDS have been averted because of the treatment program. The percentage of the population infected has dropped from 14.7% in 2004 to 10% in 2014. An estimated 50,000 infants have avoided infection transmission from their infected mothers since 2004 due to universal treatment of all pregnant women positive for HIV and prophylactic treatment of the exposed infants. Nkhoma has been an important part of this success through our own program which has over 2,000 people on treatment, and provides universal screening and treatment of pregnant women and exposed infants. There is still much to be done, and we still have patients coming to the hospital with severe opportunistic infections due to AIDS because they never were tested, and often come too late for us to save them.

We are facing many challenges, and the difficulty seems to be new challenges continuing to come before we can deal with what is already here. Please pray:

1. That God will raise up faithful, just, and competent leadership at all levels with Malawi
2. That the government will pay Nkhoma and other CHAM units what is owed
3. That there will be a new SLA for this financial year, or we will find another way to enable our communities to access the health care needed.
4. That the hospital will find a way through our own challenges of unfaithful staff, our own issues of corruption in some of our projects.
5. That the hospital will know how to deal best with issues of alcoholism among some of our staff.
6. That despite the financial challenges, as we celebrate 100 years of Nkhoma's existence this month, we will be able to continue, as our motto says, "Serving With Love and Care."
7. As Rebecca and I will be traveling to the USA for November and December, we will be able to get issues resolved as much as possible before leaving (November 05), and that our time in the States (divided between visiting family and hospital issues) will be restful, yet fruitful for the hospital as we will be meeting with many partners.

We also express our deep gratitude for all of you who have given generously to the hospital during this difficult time, enabling us to continue to purchase at least the basic medical supplies we need. Above all, thank you for your prayers on our behalf.

David and Rebecca