

## The Hereford – Muheza Link and Introduction of Palliative Care to Tanzania.

Medical care in part of Tanzania has been revolutionized with help from the Hereford - Muheza Link started over 20 years ago between Herefordshire Health Authority and Muheza Health District in Tanzania. The Link Society has arranged exchange of personnel in both directions to increase understanding of different cultures and improve standards of health care. Most years there have been eight visits. These have led to new ideas and a willingness and confidence to consider change. (1,2)

One major change, a first for Tanzania and largely begun through the Link, has been the addition of Palliative Care Services at the Government-Designated District Hospital (Hospitali Teule) in Muheza. Palliative Care was virtually unknown in Tanzania until Florence Koshuma, a nurse-midwife, spent 6 weeks through the Link visiting St. Michael's Hospice in Hereford. On her return to Tanzania, Florence gave a talk to all the medical staff and instead of harping on about lovely equipment available in the UK or money spent on patient care at St. Michael's Hospice, she focussed on holistic care of mind, body and soul, which is the very heart of palliative care. She stressed that this care was not only for patients but also for relatives. This was uncharted territory for Tanzania! She and a nursing auxiliary started a small Palliative Care Service. With no resources and little knowledge but loads of enthusiasm, they toured hospital wards doing their best for the many dying patients. Six months later a doctor and specialist nurse from St Michael's Hospice in Herefordshire went for six weeks to Hospitali Teule. Their encouragement, advice, and teaching about symptom control made the embryo Palliative Care Team feel valued, and helped to improve the service.

Mary Aloyse, another nurse-midwife from Teule, visited Hereford in 2001. She had seen Florence's work and wanted to join the team. Mary proved invaluable while Florence was away for two years upgrading her nursing diploma, and confidently stepped in and led the Palliative Care team. In 2001 there was no antiretroviral treatment in Muheza for HIV / AIDs and a slow and painful death was the usual end for patients with AIDs and cancer patients were also dying in pain. Scarcely anyone talked with these dying patients about diagnosis or prognosis, and many people spent all their funds and limited time trailing from one health facility to another and one doctor to another, seeking an impossible cure. The little team at Teule began to break through this barrier of silence and talk with patients!

In late 2001 this Palliative Care Team joined the small Muheza District HIV /AIDs Counselling and Care Team, and together they formed an independent Tanzanian NGO called "Muheza Hospice Care". The aim was to extend provision of Palliative Care out from the hospital and into villages, providing continuity of patient care. Such a service was further uncharted territory for Tanzania. Funding was obtained, first from the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund and later from the Elton John Aids Foundation and other sources, while the Hereford – Muheza Link Society provided the account through which UK support could be channelled.

Two experienced Palliative Care nurses from England visited Muheza in 2002. They shared knowledge through talks and seminars with staff of the Health Centres of Muheza District and also with Village Health Workers, thus spreading knowledge about Palliative Care as far as the villages. Two doctors from Hospitali Teule came to Hereford for training at St. Michael's Hospice, and one attended a week's multi-disciplinary Palliative Care conference at St. Christopher's Hospice in London.

Until 2002 treatment of dying patients in Muheza was difficult since only the National Cancer Hospital was allowed to use morphine for pain control. When the Tanzanian National Pharmacy Board granted permission for use of oral morphine by Muheza Hospice Care in both hospital and community, another new step had been taken. This permission was difficult to obtain even though Palliative Care without morphine for pain control has been described as "Palliative Neglect"<sup>(3)</sup>, and in 2007 Hospitali Teule is regrettably still the only government hospital where oral morphine may be used for severe pain. However through Muheza two further providers of Palliative Care have gained access to morphine for pain relief, and are expected to teach others about the proper morphine use.

Three former Link visitors, including Florence and Mary, have gained Distance Learning Diplomas in Palliative Medicine from Makerere University in Uganda. The team at Muheza Hospice Care is therefore now well qualified and strong. In 2003 when the Tanzanian Under-Secretary of State for Health opened the Diana Centre which had been specially built for Palliative Care in both hospital and community, she complimented the service as a "Jewel in the Crown". Muheza Hospice Care has also been cited as a "Centre of Excellence" by PEPFAR (the President's Emergency Plan For Aids Relief), and at the Africa Palliative Care Association's inaugural meeting in 2004 Muheza was upheld as a model that should be replicated.

The Hereford – Muheza Link in 1985 began a fruitful association and partnership between people and Health Districts. The Palliative Care aspect of the Link has most certainly and increasingly influenced medical practice in Tanzania. In 2006 Muheza Hospice Care treated and looked after 40 cancer and 4048 HIV patients <sup>(4)</sup>. This new Palliative Medicine Service, established with the Link's assistance, has improved the quality of life of many seriously ill and dying patients.

#### References:-

- 1) J.B.Wood E. Hills F.J.K. Keto. Hands across the Equator – the Hereford–Muheza Link 8 years on. BMJ 1994 ;308: 1029 - 1032
- 2) E. Hills R. Collins I. Bradley J. Wood Hands across the Equator The Hereford-Muheza Link College Commentary of Royal College of Physicians of London, May/June 2004: 20-22
- 3) Richard Harding. Irene Higginson. Palliative Care in Sub Saharan Africa: An Appraisal 2004 page 5 para 9
- 4) Muheza Hospice Care - Annual Report 2006.