

Dear everyone,

11<sup>th</sup> March 2012

Every Tuesday morning you'll find me in the paediatric cardiac clinic. It's a busy place – 2 students, a registrar and me working in a cramped room . Over the last few years this clinic has grown and grown, and we've had some success in finding opportunities for children born with congenital heart defects to have corrective surgery. Nearly 40 have been to South Africa, India, Italy or Germany to have a life-changing operation. Last Tuesday, one of the mums showed her gratitude by bringing us a chicken as a gift. Wonderful – but what do you do with a live chicken during your cardiac clinic? We decided to leave it partially wrapped up under the examination couch....where the registrar in his enthusiasm promptly stood on it. Much squawking ensued, but the chicken and the registrar survived – although the chicken's days were numbered!

Hearts have figured a lot in my thinking in the last few months. I got the chance to join with a group of doctors in Cape Town and India in a large multi-centre study of rheumatic heart disease – a problem that used to occur in the UK, but declined as the standard of living improved. Sadly it still kills over 250,000 people every year, mainly children and young adults in Africa and India. I went to Cape Town in February and was able to share our difficulties – lack of equipment and staff etc. Out of the blue, the doctors at Red Cross Children's hospital offered to donate one of their older (but still excellent) portable ultrasound machines to us *if* they could get through the red-tape. Thank you to those of you who prayed for this – the machine is being hand-delivered to Blantyre in May.

In the space of a week after my return, 3 of our chronically ill children with rheumatic heart disease died. One was Ndaona –her name literally means 'I have seen'. It reminds us of the Lord who sees and hears the cries of parents and children in distress (Genesis 16:13, 21:17), even those the world neglects.

We had a great break with family and friends over the Christmas period in England and Ireland. Thank you to the Irwins who generously let us a beautiful cottage on the outskirts of Bangor. It was good to see family again – below is a picture of our children showing their younger cousins how to behave...! We returned to a mountain of Christmas cards from lots of Presbyterian Women's groups and Sunday Schools. Thank you so much to everyone who sent their greetings.



In January we were able to start a new treatment for children with pneumonia. We've been working with Rice University Engineering faculty to develop a low-cost bubble 'CPAP' device for children with pneumonia or premature lungs. The treatment is well known in the West, but the devices cost about £5000 – ours costs \$300 and we are working with the local engineering faculty to get it produced in Malawi. The WHO has shown a lot of interest and is funding work to develop it and roll it out across the region. Below is a photo of it in action!



It's not all been good news since Christmas. The One-Stop Centre building is *still* not opened due to last-minute glitches with getting the furniture, finishing some drain covers etc. Frustrating but at least the work has gone on with the children. Progress with prosecution of offenders has been hampered by a strike which has closed the courts for over a month. The fuel crisis – a consequence of the wider political problems in Malawi – rumbles on and stopped trips with students to Bangula and Embangweni. This weekend I saw several queues nearly 1km long! The government is under pressure from the International Monetary Fund to devalue the kwacha by 40% - a move that would cause real hardship to many poor people in the short term.

March is exam month for our postgraduates. Emmie, Sandy and George are taking part 1 or 2 professional paediatric exams. Please pray for them. The postgraduate program is a lot of work and takes up a lot of my time (preparing each exam is about 2 weeks work), but is undoubtedly worthwhile as we see a cohort of Malawian specialists take on the work. Below is Emmie – taking clinic outside as there was no room inside!



Sara and the kids are all well. Ben is enjoying his work with the street children each Sunday morning. Grace is happy as the piano has just been repaired. Sara is preparing for her annual assault on Mulanje mountain with her year 6 class – so each weekend involves hikes in the nearby hills / mountains. School is busy with the final year concert and the dreaded final year ‘country project’ – a ritual beloved by every Phoenix parent!

Some points for prayer include:

- Give thanks for the offer of the cardiac scanner, and pray for its safe arrival. Pray for continued improvements in care for the children we see
- Pray for Emmie, Sandy and George as they take their exams and for Neil as he prepares and runs them.
- Pray for the completion of the One-Stop Centre and the ongoing work of the child protection team. Pray they will persevere despite all the frustrations and obstacles to progress
- Pray for the government of Malawi that it will make just decisions that will benefit the poor

Thanks for taking the time to read this, for your ongoing interest and prayer.

*Neil, Sara, Ben and Grace.*