



# BLESSINGS HOSPITAL

LUMBADZI, MALAWI

AUGUST 2011

N E W S L E T T E R

## Longtime Coming

*By Wes Gunn*

Months of work and labor by dozens of people finally could be seen as we completed construction on the Blessings Hospital Surgical Center. It began many years ago as a dream that eventually turned into the shell of a building in 2005. But then it lay dormant for many years, untouched and unfinished.

One statistic that kept burning in several of our minds pushed us to finish the construction. *There are only 15 surgeons in the entire nation of Malawi with a population of nearly 15 million.*

That's 1 surgeon for every one million people. We have more than that on one street in Montgomery, AL.

In August 2008 several people felt led to work towards its completion and organize surgical teams from the US that

could offer procedures that were most desperately needed.

In September of 2009 Dr. Jeff Bennie, an anesthesiologist from Nashville, TN traveled to Malawi to do a site evaluation. Dr. Bennie became one of the



Operating Rm #1 at the newly completed Blessings Hospital Surgical Center

greatest advocates of moving forward. Soon God led Dr. Ken Mitchell, an OB surgeon in Pensacola, FL to join in on our vision. These two men have provided critical insight into the planning and assembling of operating room equipment.

But one large question remained, where would the money come from to make all of this a reality? The furnishing and infrastructure of a surgical center is no small task. Then in November of

2010 God provided through a \$70,000 gift from a family charity. We went to work putting the plan into action.

We went to work assembling equipment with Project Cure, a national non-profit that collects medical supplies for mission hospitals. Engineers, electricians, and water systems people began to

design the infrastructure. In March the whole water system at Blessings was re-worked to ensure adequate supply.

Then in June & July of this year, several teams of people worked to unload our 40 foot container to furnish our

surgery suite and install all of the electrical, new 60 KW generator, operating lights, sterilizers, and other machines. As it normally goes in Malawi, it wasn't without its challenges. In the middle of all this Malawi was experiencing fuel shortages, withdrawal of aid from the UK, and political riots



A new 60 KW generator finds its new home to power the entire Blessings campus.

that led to the deaths of 18 people.

Then on July 28 the Malawi Medical Council came for inspection and recommended we be given the license to fully open our facility. When the Malawi staffing is completed with the required doctors and nursing staff, the inpatient and surgical services will be full throttle. Our first surgical team from the U.S. is scheduled for the middle of November.

We are very grateful to all the volunteers who have helped to make this dream a reality. We know that in the years to come



Surgical Recovery Room

hundreds and thousands of people will benefit from this surgery center.

If you are a medical person and are interested in being a part of one of our surgical trips, please contact us and we'll provide you with the detailed information.

## **Muli Bwanji, Chimwemwe! Meet the Clinical Officer**

Seven months ago Blessings Hospital was fortunate to have clinical officer Chimwemwe Kateka join our staff ("*Chimwemwe*" in Chichewa means "*joy*"). And what a joy it has been to have him! Chimwemwe's delightful personality and friendly smile help him connect with his patients easily.

Malawi's medical system begins with medical assistance, then clinical officer, medical doctor, then specialist. Because of the tremendous shortage of doctors in Malawi, clinical officers carry a heavy load in performing routine and even life-threatening care. Clinical officers, who are required 3 years in college and a 1 year

internship, are even permitted to perform c-sections.

This 28 year-old graduate of Malawi College of Health Sciences had originally thought he would pursue a degree in business administration. But then a typical Malawi experience one day began to shape his heart.

After passing his college entrance exams he began thinking about the needs in his community and how he could make an impact. Then one day he waited in line with his ill niece to see the doctor. After waiting for several hours and still not having been seen, he started to think about serving in a career in medicine.

In addition to his medical training, Chimwemwe is a man who loves the Lord. A



*Blessings Hospital Clinical Officer  
Chimwemwe Kateka.*

member of the Falls Church of Christ in Lilongwe, he sees his medical service also as a ministry. Chimwemwe says, "First and foremost, before we start our services, we normally have a time of prayer, bearing in mind that we can't make it

on our own, but we need God. Not only just the staff, but our clients can also join that time. We also inform members of our staff about how to approach people who are sick and downtrodden. We want them to feel at home. They should see a difference between us and other health care facilities. If I feel there is a need for spiritual guidance, I offer advice in giving them hope.”

He continues, “I’ve been to different hospitals around. I’ve seen people staying at the hospital all day long without getting any assistance because of lack of personnel, drugs, or equipment. When I see these facilities (at Blessings), I see hope in a lot of lives.”

We are very thankful that God brought Chimwemwe our way and look forward to his continuing role at Blessings Hospital.

## Labor & Delivery Set to Open in Sept!

If you’ve ever been to one of the government hospitals or clinics, one of the most difficult scenes for Americans to witness is the conditions in which many babies enter the world. Not uncommonly a simple plastic bag the mother brings with her is all the supplies available. Malawi has the 11th highest infant mortality rate in the world.

One of the dreams of the facility from the very beginning was to



Our labor ward has room for 3 active labor, 3 in pre-labor, and 12 in postpartum.



To allow for the new surgical center, the entire electrical system on the campus was redesigned & shipped from America. Many thanks to Crosby Electric in Montgomery, AL who donated supplies and one of their technicians!

have a place where women could safely give birth to healthy babies and provide them a chance for a great start in life. Harold Banda, our administrator, has a background in midwifery and a passion to see this as the next phase.

In July a team from Landmark Church worked tirelessly to ready the ward with beds, equipment, and all the supplies. That was followed by an inspection by Nurses Council of Malawi. After the finishing touches to complete the requirements and the right staffing hired, we’ll be able to send you pictures of some new babies you helped to welcome into the world!

## Contact

For more information about Blessings Hospital or to put your name on a list of medical professionals interested in traveling on a surgical team in the future, please contact:

### Landmark Church of Christ

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To make a financial gift for the hospital, please mark your check for “Surgery Center” in the memo line.

