

Notes From The Field

November 2008 - Rwanda

While Rwanda is politically stable and economically growing, there are only about 520 clinically practicing physicians for the almost 9 million people living in Rwanda. The Center for Global Health (CGH) is in the midst of a three year United States Agency for International Development (USAID) contract working with the National University of Rwanda (NUR) to change this situation through: 1) the sustainable development of current post-graduate (residency) education programs in anesthesia, internal medicine, obstetrics-gynecology, pediatrics and surgery; and 2) development and implementation of a sustainable post-graduate program in family medicine.

Since January 2007, 25 faculty from the US have provided bedside and classroom teaching of required post-graduate curriculum in molecular biology, immunology, general and subspecialty pediatrics, otolaryngology, emergency medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, maternal fetal medicine, urology, general surgery, infections disease, pulmonology, gastroenterology, cardiology, endocrinology and family medicine. Drs. Wilson (Director) and Bardella (Associate Director), of the Center, are working with the NUR Dean Nsanze, family medicine faculty Prof. Barongo and the Ministry of Health to develop the policy and process for the implementation of a family medicine post-graduate program which began in August 2008. Faculty and program needs assessments conducted during July 2007 are guiding program development through 2009.

Inis Jane Bardella, MD, FFAFP, is an Associate Director of the Center for Global Health at the University of Colorado Denver. She is currently living in Rwanda as the CGH family medicine faculty working on our USAID contract with NUR. During her time in Rwanda she has agreed to send monthly updates of her progress and experiences. The following is a description of her experiences and work in Rwanda in her own words.



November 2008 Entry

Amazing, my husband, Bob, and I have been living and working in Rwanda for three months! Time flies even in a culture where processes move slowly.

We are here for the Center for Global Health work on the USAID funded Rwanda Medical Training Initiative with our partners the National University of Rwanda and Centura Health. My official roles are to provide postgraduate (resident) teaching where needed, facilitate the acquisition and implementation of medical education resources and work with Professor Barongo, the academic head of the family and community medicine program (FAMCO) and the sole family medicine faculty, to implement the FAMCO postgraduate program. So what am I really doing?

Basically, I am teaching, facilitating, networking and mentoring. I developed and taught a 15 hour Research Methodology Common Course for the first year postgraduates. The course is "Common" because all the first years in all the specialties take the courses. Although, I perform research and mentor students and faculty, I did not have 15 hours of structured curriculum – I do now with PowerPoints and handouts! Actualizing the course requires teaching it twice – once in Kigali and once in Butare – because the postgraduates are assigned across three teaching hospitals in these two cities which are two and a half hours apart. I am in the midst of teaching a second 15 hour Common Course on Reading and Writing Medical Literature. This time I am using telemedicine to teach in both cities simultaneously because my facilitating, networking, travel and meeting schedules limit the days I am available to teach. This works well except when someone borrows the camera without notice, forcing Dr. Claude Rutanga, the FAMCO Coordinator, to traverse town to fetch another camera!

Prof. Barongo and I have developed the details for the implementation of the FAMCO program at the district hospitals. There are seven FAMCO postgraduate students who are trying to understand this new specialty while Prof. Barongo and I are working to actualize the program. Actualization requires meeting with the Minister of Health (MOH) since the MOH verbally committed the money to support the FAMCO program. The MOH is the entity which must implement and fund all the details for FAMCO education and training at the district hospitals.

The in-country faculty, me, also facilitates the allocation and nurturing of resources for the RMTI program in conjunction with our wonderful Rwandan RMTI Project Coordinator, Jovin Akana Bakunzi. These resources include visiting faculty from the University of Colorado every one to two months, text and electronic education materials, relationships with our committed African colleagues and new money of \$50,000 which USAID is adding to our project in 2009. A potential new resource is a planning grant for the development of higher education in Africa which will involve NUR, Weill Bugando Medical School in Tanzania, our colleagues in the social sciences at the downtown campus and the Center for Global Health.

Bob is focusing on business development. He is mentoring Gilbert, an economics major, who wants to start a tee shirt business. A group of missionaries are using Bob to assist them with the development of a camp on Lake Kivu into a resort. Chris Page, who developed Cards From Africa, is tapping Bob's expertise to expand and improve the businesses he has started in Rwanda which employ Rwandan nationals.



Donner and Blitzen

Then there are our extra curricular activities. We walk every week or two to use the fitness facility at the Novotel Hotel and buy their delicious "pain complete" – multigrain bread. We walk to church. In fact, we do a lot of walking since we do not have a car. But everyone in Rwanda walks a lot, so there are shops, markets, churches, schools and banks within walking distance. Three or four mornings a week we do a morning exercise walk around our neighborhood – we are the only people walking for exercise. Children are walking to primary school so we help them practice "Bonjour", "Hello" and "How are you, I am fine." Men and women are walking up the hill to employment. We are also working with one of the medical student groups. Bob is working with "our" two German shepherds, Donner and Blitzen, which came with our house, so they will not attack our Rwanda friends.

Much of our life in Rwanda is similar to our life in Denver. There are mountains – after all, Rwanda is the land of a thousand hills. We can walk to shopping, restaurants and church. The commute to my office is short. Email starts most days. We have pizza once a week for dinner. A drive to the international airport is 20 minutes. We have hot and cold running water consistently – we do have to remember to turn on the water heater at night if we want hot showers in the morning. We have an automatic washer. We have radio and television. We now have high speed internet. So how is Rwanda different?

The answers to that question will have to wait until next time. Suffice it to say, things are good in Rwanda. As expected, there are differences and there are challenges. There are also medical students and postgraduate students who want to learn and become competent physicians – just like in Denver.

Inis Bardella, MD, FAAFP
Associate Director
Center for Global Health
Colorado School of Public Health



Dr. Bardella and husband Bob at Nyungwa National Park