

Nicci's Update from Uganda – June 2021

Dear family and friends

May has felt very full and very busy. Here's a rather long update to give you a flavour of what's been happening.

Work-wise – Both outpatients and the paediatric ward were very busy indeed in May. We saw around 25% more outpatients than in April! Most of the children we saw had respiratory problems and the ward has been full of coughing children for most of the month. (No idea if any of them had Covid because testing is virtually impossible!) At one stage we had the main ward full of children on oxygen and the overflow ward had to overflow into yet another room to accommodate all the other sick children who didn't need oxygen. We have also continued to see significant numbers of severely malnourished children.

Thankfully Special Care was only moderately busy for most of the month which allowed us to spend a bit more time with the large number of older patients that were on the paediatric ward. Despite being only moderately busy, we had some really challenging term and premature babies to look after.

Sadly we have had a high number of admissions to the crisis centre too. These included three newborn babies whose mums had died as well as three lovely little boys aged between about 9 and 12 months who had all been abandoned.



One of our tiniest patients enjoys a moment with her mum



Nurse Julius gets his Covid jab from his colleague, Sylvester

My community activities continue to inspire and challenge me. I really enjoy getting out to the hospital, clinics and villages. The rising number of attendances at Potter's Village by people from the Batwa village seems to indicate that the people are happy with what we are providing for them. It's also really encouraging to get positive feedback from the hospital staff about the positive impact of some of the work we are doing together, although I am also often reminded of just how much more needs to be done.

Covid news – Covid numbers have begun to rise rapidly, especially in the bigger cities. Many people travel regularly between Kampala and Kisoro, so we will soon be seeing many more cases here. Masks and distancing are not a feature of public transport any more than they are a feature of daily life in Kisoro!

Vaccine uptake is improving a little in the face of rising case numbers. I fear that, for many people, a vaccine is seen as a passport to continuing to ignore the rules on masks and distancing. I, along with several medical centre colleagues, have now had a second dose of the Astra Zeneca vaccine (Thanks to COVAX!) but its effect against the South African strain of the virus (B.1.351), which is one of the many circulating here, is probably quite low so we are not out of the woods yet!

We are expecting the announcement of some sort of lockdown in Uganda in the next couple of days. It's an unenviable decision for the politicians to have to make because the suffering for many under lockdown may be worse than the number of deaths from Covid. I'll keep you posted on developments via my blog.

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Non-work things – Despite the craziness of work, I've been trying to get out for a good walk at least once a week. It is wonderful to get away from the noise and busyness of our compound when I can and get some fresh air and sunshine. I hope I will never be too busy to appreciate the beautiful environment in which I live.

The noise level in our compound has gone up significantly in recent weeks since the huge eucalyptus trees between us and the school opposite have been cut down. The tree felling process was pretty frightening with a complete absence of any safety precautions for either workers or bystanders. Falling trees caused some damage to our compound wall and the "felling" of our electrical power a couple of times – one episode left a live cable hanging at waist height outside the front door to the medical centre! We were also without power for 4 days. It's never dull around here!

I had been really struggling with the noise levels in and around the compound for a while and the absence of the trees has made it quite a bit worse. I haven't been sleeping very well as a result of the constant noise. In my free evenings I'm trying various means to "soundproof" my house but without making it feel like a prison!

You may have seen the news about the eruption of the volcano Nyiragongo and the partial evacuation of the city of Goma. Nyiragongo is part of the same chain of mountains/volcanoes that I can see from my window and Goma is around 70km south-west of Kisoro. Following the eruption there have been large numbers of earthquakes, some of the bigger ones were felt here. It's quite frightening to hear and feel the house shaking, especially in the middle of the night, but we are all safe!

I attended a lovely party in the Rottmann's garden to say farewell to them as they will be returning to Germany in a couple of weeks. There will still be a few more chances to say goodbye before they finally leave but I will miss them desperately, especially Juliane, who has become a trusted friend.

Keeping in touch – Thank you so much to everyone who manages to keep in touch by email, WhatsApp and Zoom – it is very much appreciated! Thank you for the parcels and packages which continue to arrive to make it feel like Christmas and my birthday almost every week! I'm still blogging at www.niccimaxwell.wordpress.com if you'd like to know the most recent news.

I think that's enough for now!

Love to you all,
Nicci

For your prayers

Give thanks for:

- a busy spell which helps the medical centre finances - almost everything we do is funded by patient fees
- the life-saving work of the crisis centre in caring for abandoned babies and those whose mothers have died
- the opportunity to get out for lovely walks as a break from the busyness
- the talent and commitment of Idah, our administrator, and Jovia, our senior nurse and for the good working relationships we have

Please pray for:

- the many very sick children we continue to see, especially those with severe malnutrition
- ongoing safety as I travel to various outreach activities
- restful sleep so I can be safe and effective in my work and to find ways to deal with intrusive noise at home
- the next wave of the pandemic which is underway in Uganda - that people would start to comply with precautions and get vaccinated if they are eligible
- the Rottmann family as they transition back to life in Germany and for the work and friends they are leaving behind in Kisoro
- protection and safety for the people of Goma, especially those displaced by the volcano and for no further eruptions of Nyiragongo



Spot the difference – before and after the tree felling