

Urolink Report. Trip to Zimbabwe and Zambia November 2011

I left UK on 25th November flying KLM and Kenya Airways. They are the cheapest. We got stuck in Nairobi for the very obscure reason the plane was on the wrong place on the tarmac and it was pissing it down with rain. The trip therefore took an extra 3 hours, 26 in all and I arrived in Harare hot and tired.

I was met by Christopher Samkange, urologist at University teaching hospital. The place was much better than when I was here last 3 years ago, the shops were full of stuff, there were cars on the road and petrol was plentiful and relatively cheap. The currency is still the \$US since their money collapsed. These dollar notes are grey/black and torn as they are not getting any new ones unless some traveller such as me arrives in the country. Apparently the US banks have said they will replace these grotty notes with new ones.

The heavens opened the day I arrived. It had been the rainy season for a month but no rain for 4 weeks and there was a drought in the NE of the country. It never stopped raining thereafter and the grass went green and the flame trees were splendid.

The first weekend it was end of term and the school year and there were carol concerts and parties. I went with Chris to take Nyeri, the oldest girl, to end of her final year party at Meikles, a hotel in the centre of Harare the last bastion of the fading colonial system which was built in the 19th century, shades of Rhodes, except the clientele are of all races and hues which is great.

The roads were flooded and chaos reigned in the snarl up not a policeman or traffic person in sight.

The lights/electricity come on and off randomly with no warning, water is now plentiful, I managed 5 strip washes in warm water standing in a basin the bath and I braved one cold shower.

From the Monday to the Wednesday I taught the M Med surgical trainees in all disciplines including general surgery, orthopaedics, neurosurgery and urology on exam techniques How to do OSCES, oral exams and to present papers as well as brushing up their anatomy, which is not well taught. They were a very enjoyable, great bunch of young men and women.

I had hoped to do some radio programmes for Radio Wales on the surgical training in Zimbabwe but Christopher decided that as the BBC is banned in Zimbabwe [whilst Robert Mugabe is still around] that it would not be safe for me to record around the hospital. Not all the medics are moderates like Christopher and some may even be members of Zanu PF.

On the last evening we took Virginia [Chris' wife] and the 3 kids to a diner for her birthday. It was packed, loads of good food and drink. This is an amazing change from the misery of 2008.

Christopher Samkange working at home in Harare



Train the Examiners meeting at the Mika Hotel Lusaka



The following day we drove the 7 hour journey north to Zambia. We were accompanied by a young looking paediatric surgeon Bothwell, second name unspellable. There is now a single post at the Zim/Zam border, very efficient. Took only an hour to get through and that was mostly the cars fault, so much paper work and you need two breakdown triangles in the car to enter Zambia, fortunately we had them. It was very hot but the Zambezi escarpment was wonderful to drive down.

We arrived gasping for a beer, in the dark, into Lusaka to find what we needed in the Manda Hill shopping centre which had grown massively and had a new double storey car park. I stayed with my good friends Prof Mohamed and Mona Labib, the others were in the Mika hotel with all the other examiners for the COSECSA examinations.

The following day was for all the membership and fellowship examiners to teach us how to examine [yet again!!]. I used to run this but it is now run by Prof Jani, a general surgeon from Nairobi, the examinations coordinator with the help of surgeons and some monies from the Irish College. A long day with poor air conditioning but, as the Mika hotel not the most expensive, it was expected. Most of the examiners are from the 9 African countries which make up COSECSA [Ruanda was added 2 years ago] are not by western standards well paid and Zambia is wickedly expensive. Petrol is the same price as in the UK. The Brits and South African surgeons were holed up in a posh hotel in the centre of town, where my daughter and her fellow, Iwan, were to arrive at on the Monday, after a week bungee jumping and white water rafting in Victoria Falls. You may ask how my daughter can afford a posh hotel, it is the cunningness of the youth of today [ie Iwan] booking on line and getting the best bargain. Anyhow they had saved masses of money travelling to and from Vic Falls by bus. Ruth sat next to chickens and Iwan consoled a little girl with car sickness, for most of the 6 hour journey.

Whilst Mohamed was busy with COSECSA business all weekend Mona and I went out eating, sight seeing and eating ice creams.

Monday started at 5.30am, I did not know this time existed!! in order to get to the hospital for the membership exams. There were plenty of candidates, at least 24, so we had 2 teams of examiners. 2 sets of 8 OSCE stations and double the oral examiners, there were 3 orals for each of the candidates. Excellent clinical material with massive goitres, breast lumps, TB spine, but no urology so with permission I changed the history taking from a case of haematemesis to haematuria.

I heard at this time my sister and her daughter who had just arrived in Nairobi, to see her son [also a doctor] had been involved in a car accident. They were in hospital, my sister with damaged pelvis and my niece with fractured ribs and a haemo-pneumo-thorax. They have now recovered and are home. They said they were very well treated at the Nairobi hospital. The roads are extremely dangerous in Africa partly due to the driving and partly the single track roads not suitable for overtaking. The potholes are fewer than the used to be.

The next day was the Fellowship examinations. We had 2 candidates for F.Urol both from Zambia so Mohamed could not examine. I examined the clinicals with Hassan Ashmawy from Bulawayo and the orals with Rosemary ? urologist from Mulago hospital, Uganda. Again excellent clinical material, a boy with a stone in his urethra, a hypospadias repair fistula, ca bladder and chronic renal failure due to chronic retention in an old man. The examinations are held in English with nurses translating if the patients did not speak English, as there are numerous local dialects. We passed only one candidate this is the Victor whom Jaimin [Blatt], who regularly visits Lusaka, has been supporting for the last 3 years.

In the evening we had a great party out of town organised for the examiners by Denis Robson of Johnson and Johnson [Ethicon] who generously run these gatherings every year. I think they do make a good deal of money in the African market from sutures and laparoscopic equipment. All my old friends were there Bob Lane [external examiner from ASGBI], Paul Gartell, GI surgeon from Winchester, running a laparoscopic course at the same time as the exams. Then blow me down with a feather, Gordon Williams, urologist now in Ethiopia, pops up. The COSECSA meeting is in Addis Ababa next year and he wanted to know what we are all about.

The Wednesday was the big day for me and as Mohammed still in his organiser mode had to leave early and Mona was working for COMECA [an international trading group], I walk half a mile to the Conference Centre in 40 degree heat in my posh clothes. I had the sense to take an extra blouse with me, as I arrived dripping wet!!!!

The graduation ceremony was late starting due to the Minister of Health being delayed but the police band with great gusto but not an awful lot of skill kept us entertained. They love their ceremony and do it with great colourfulness, the gowns alone are gold, red and black with the logo of 2 scalpels and one giraffe. There was dancing, drums and a vicious looking

lead man pretending to be warlike with a hatchet supposedly attacking the Minister of Health.

There were 5 of us getting Hon fellowships. I was in illustrious company; Denis Robson, Steve Mannion [orthopod from Blackpool/Malawi who has been to many war zones, Geoff Walker, retired orthopod from Addis Ababa and the final secret one to Yusef [Dawood] Kadwalader, the founder of the Rahima Dawood fellowships on his 50th year in ASEA [COSECSA].

Christopher Samkange gave my citation beautifully, with wit even chastising me for still smoking and even mentioned my daughter Ruth who was sitting near the front. We all had 3 minutes to reply, which I just managed, saying how much I love Africa.

The Rahima Dawood lecture was given by Mr Joseph McManner, a maxillary facial surgeon from Glasgow who showed graphic surgery of head tongue and neck tumours/deformities and the magnificent results which can be obtained with this intricate surgery. Afterwards there was a reception on the lawn, more dancing, eating, drinking and the erstwhile ferocious looking warrior got Ruth up to dance. Not her favourite pastime!!!



From L to R Prof Mohamed Labib, myself, Christopher Samkange and Hassan Ashmawy [Bulawayo] all urologists after the ceremony

My daughter Ruth with Christopher Samkange holding my certificate



Now Ruth had managed to get my recording equipment working properly again I did interviews for Radio Wales on surgical training in Zimbabwe, and the state of play in the hospitals which has improved since they were shut down for lack of equipment 3 years ago. Also what is happening in Malawi, Zambia and the rest of east Africa and the fact that anaesthetists at last are also being trained. So things are slowly improving although there are areas where the surgery is light years behind some places are doing laparoscopic surgery and renal transplant surgery is also being extended, to Lusaka for example.

Just as we were ready to go old friend Michael Breen, gynaecologist from Monze turns up for the next 2 days of clinical papers. It was lovely to see him again. After one more huge ice cream at Manda Hill, with all of us together, I go to pack and leave at midnight as I need to get home to do county council work on Friday. Uneventful trip except I crossed Schipol airport in 15 minutes to get my connection to Manchester. I was faster than my suitcase which caught up with me 2 days later.

Next year I will be free of local politics so would be happy to go to Addis Ababa to continue my love affair with Africa.

Thanks go to:

- Urolink [BAUS] for paying my airfare and they would have paid my XS baggage but I wriggled out of it.
- The Samkanges and the Labibs for their wonderful hospitality.

- Nyere Samkange for driving me around Harare
- COSECSA for honouring me with Hon F.ECSA.
- Ruth and Iwan for being there at the ceremony and not getting hurt doing dangerous things at Victoria Falls

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