

26 Feb 2015

Let's try this again ☺ The past 2 weeks have been a blur of activity and I still struggle with trying to figure out what day of the week it is. Things here are in a constant state of flux...just when we think we are headed to go do "ABC" we get redirected to do "JKL." FLEX has taken on a whole new meaning...such is the nature of working in a developing country when there is an international health crisis waging havoc on an already struggling health system, a government that has never dealt with such a crisis, and multiple international NGOs (Non-Government Organizations) all trying to help (sometimes unknowingly duplicating efforts). One thing is for sure everyone's focus is the same – get to "zero" (which means no new cases within a consecutive 42 day period).

I continue to be working out in the communities with the centers set up to receive, screen, identify those with the illness, start treatment, and get them to the appropriate treatment unit asap. Although I miss the direct patient care I am enjoying working with the national staff at several centers while encouraging them and doing training – after all they are the ones at the frontline in remote communities that do not have access to health care, many communities still have a lot of fear of the units and therefore tend to come for help when they are well into their illness which greatly increases the likelihood of them dying. For whatever reason God has directed my path in a way that I am somewhat shielded from the battles that are lost at the unit, but also the wins that do come. To be honest sometimes I wish I was at the bedside caring for a sick patient, but I came to do whatever the Lord has planned, so just as I told PIH (Partners in Health)– I will do whatever is needed, wherever it is needed (which PIH holding me to ☺).

Because of the nature of the work I am doing there is a lot of interaction with WHO, CDC, P LAN, and a multitude of other local/international government and NGO organizations. I have learned so much about how do you attack an out of control killer illness in third world country. Needless to say the behind the scenes activity is mind blowing and encouraging. To see so many different nations and organizations standing shoulder to shoulder in battle is beyond words.

Right now the focus of the team I am on is to reopen the community clinics (which were closed because of the risk of the illness contamination in such settings), scale down some of the centers and to close the 2 in centers our district that are located in schools. They are trying to reopen schools the end of March – this is a major concern, as we still continue to have quite a few new cases each day. The desire to try to get back to some normalcy is perfectly understandable but the concern is that if this is done too soon there will be a resurgence of the illness.

So to put a "face" on all of this, let me just share one of the many experiences I have had:

I went to visit a family who were struggling psychologically and emotionally from all they had endured. As we talked with one of the men he started crying...this is his story. Months ago his grandmother had done what she has done for years, assist with preparation of a deceased body of friend's family member and she attended the burial. This was very common and normal here – prior to the illness. Then she became sick, her great grandchild (this man's baby) also became sick, the grandmother died, the baby died. Then his parents get sick and die. Then several of his siblings get sick and his wife as well. His brother, sister-in-law, and wife survive but because of the illness several of their babies and small children are sent to a home where they have to stay and be monitored for 21 days. The young mothers, who survived, are longing to hold their babies. The house is still under quarantine, so no one can come in or leave, food has to be delivered to them, and they just sit around all day – hurting for the great losses of their family. How do you possibly comfort them? I was with 2 national nurses, who are remarkable as they talked with them, counseled them, encouraged them, and will continue to follow up on them. The family is Muslim, so I just stood there fighting back tears (I am supposed to be the professional healthcare worker and they didn't need me crying right now). I just started praying that God would comfort them, shine His light into their hearts and they would come to know the one true God who is more than capable to reveal Himself to them and meet their needs.

On a lighter note....I have managed to become rather famous here LOL. Remember I mentioned we are starting to close some of the centers. There was one in a school that we were instructed to close, decontaminate, dismantle and burn all the temporary structures that were built to construct the center for proper caring of possible ill patients. So off one of my team mates and I go early one day...we had our marching orders: decon the place and prepare it for dismantling/burning. So we get there talk with the national staff, formulate our plan of action (according to WHO guidelines), and suit up to do our task for the day. In my infinite wisdom I suggested that we go ahead and burn all the mattresses, furniture, and supplies in the RZ (the high risk area where patients would be until sent to the unit and you wear your full suit). My thought – let's get a jump on all the burning that was to be done the next day. So we did – Yeah team!!! Or so we thought....that night the decision was made to keep the center open – WHAT???? Well, now we have an issue....they have no RZ...mmmm. Bottom line was the center needed to close and we have no idea why the decision was reversed, but the next day it was re-reversed and the center was still to close....WHEW.... But now it seems to be the talk of meetings...the burning of the RZ at this center. Even at a big meeting I was at 2 days ago (all the local government, paramount chiefs, NGOs, etc) the comment was made that “communication should be done before things are burned...” I told my team mate “I guess we are famous” LOL. But...I certainly did not identify myself at the meeting. The comment from my leadership was that I did the right thing and they were pleased with my initiative. They also said that if anything else needs to be burned, they were sending me.... 😊

Side note...although I have not managed to learn any of the local languages I do now know enough acronyms to fill a small notebook....so I guess that qualifies as learning a new language.

Below is a link to a video that I ran across when looking for some training videos for here. Thought it would be of interest. Warning you may want to grab a tissue. Although life, on the surface, here appears to be just humming along as normal, a closer look reveals something totally different. The illness has caused such a rippling effect of decimation here that it will be years to find any sense of security and normalcy. Their cultural practices have been forever changed.

Please continue to lift everyone here up in your prayers – they are so needed and are the only manner in which true healing can come to this land and these people.

To my family – THANK YOU SO MUCH for your love, support and prayers – you are the foundation that enables me to go and do, especially to come to a place like this to work. I miss you terribly (thank goodness for Skype), but I know that God has a plan to work even our time away from each other for His glory.

To my dear friends – you are the threads that God has woven into a wonderful tapestry that I am wrapped in constantly. You have each helped to guide and shape me through your individual specialness. Thank you for being a part of my life (especially, unlike my family, you have a choice 😊)!

Love you all!

Cindy

Here is the link:

<http://www.umcom.org/global-communications/ebola-a-poem-for-the-living>