

May 12, 2015

A quick note:

When I left Sierra Leone in March Ebola was very much alive and well. Praise God that is not the case upon my return the end of April. As I write this we are DAY 6 of ZERO...yes that is NO new cases. The end appears to be in sight, but the battle is far from over. We have to make it to day 42 to be declared "Ebola free," which Liberia was just declared! *Well I did not send this when I wrote it and unfortunately our days of "zero" cases ended. We have had several in the last several days.*

We are preparing for the next stage of this tragedy – the aftermath. Ebola survivors have a lot of post illness problems, to include going blind, headaches, and constant joint pain. The already poor health system is in shambles. And the list just goes on....

My work right now is focused on 2 CHC (Community Health Clinics...remember everything here is in acronyms☺), 1 CCC (Community Care Clinic) and a front line triage unit at PLGH (the local government hospital). As Ebola fades from the forefront the focus with my work it to establish SRUs (Screen and Referral Units), to ensure proper IPC (Infection Prevention and Control), and train the staff on how to properly screen and triage every person who comes to their facility. If the person screens positive for EVD (Ebola Virus Disease) then they are placed into an isolation room and the DERC (District Ebola Response Command) is called for the patient to be transferred to an ETC (Ebola Treatment Center). A lot of the work here is a coordinated effort with the WHO and CDC (I think you know what those to stand for ☺), the DMHT (District Medical Health Team) and MOHS (Ministry of Health and Sanitation).....Isn't this fun. I can have whole conversations without saying one "word" LOL.

To give you a sense of some of the challenges, one of the community health clinics I am working with has 2 nurses with an education at or below an LPN, 1 cleaner who is a sweet elderly petite lady, and a volunteer who helps out. That may not sound too bad until you consider they are responsible for 26 villages and approximately 8900 people. They have no supplies, no medications, a dilapidate structure, no power, water from a hand pump well....they do prenatal care, family planning, deliver babies, give immunizations, do community outreach, see and treat patients daily and much more. They are open or on call 24/7. Their pay is often several months in arrears and what little money they make they will spend to purchase medications for a sick patient. And they have been doing this throughout the Ebola outbreak. I don't know of many people who would sign up for a job like this, or who would stay in a job like this, but they do.

They always have a smile on their faces, such sweet dispositions, and eager to learn whatever new knowledge we have to share. Their compassion and commitment are an example of why the work here is so meaningful. They, as well as the people they serve, deserve to have a healthcare system that works and provides proper healthcare. The location of your birth should not determine whether or not you have access to even basic healthcare, let alone state of the art healthcare.

There are many challenges here – but there are all worth it. The people I am blessed to work with are phenomenal. The national and the PIH staff work tirelessly to make a difference here. It can be frustrating at times working within a confusing, broken, and fragmented system but the joy when strides are made, when progress and improvement happen, albeit small at times, are what it is all about. As much as we would love to come in a wave a magic wand to make everything better that is not possible.

We are here to walk with them side-by-side, after all this is their country their home and the improvements that they desire must come from within – we are here to provide support and guidance. We are here to teach people to fish...so they can eat for a lifetime. Not give them a fish...so they can eat for the day.

On a personal note I would have to say this trip – even though I have only been here 3 weeks – feels much different than prior trips. I miss my family more than I ever have. I guess the fact that I won't be home in 2-5 weeks like past trips may be why. I am doing fine and God continues to renew my spirit reassuring me that I am where I am supposed to be. I have created my "home-away-from-home." My accommodations are quite a step up from the tent, although it was a very nice set up, that I live in for 6 weeks. I have a nice size room and bathroom, comfortable king size bed (of which I only sleep on 1/3 of), AC (yes...it is a comfortable 70ish in my room...too bad I have to leave it during the heat of the day LOL), hot water (although at the end of the hot humid day a cold shower still feels much better), internet (although not as fast as we would like...we are so spoiled) and good food.

Although it is no "secret" as to where I am, I am going to maintain a somewhat low profile, more than I would on a normal mission trip, due to the sensitivity of the situation here. Our media tends to sensationalize things to raise anxiety or emotions, sometimes at the expense of others. That is not my intent with sharing my experiences here.

As of when I left home there was little to no news of Ebola in the US...it had become "old news". For those who live in this region of the world it is far from "old news" it is their daily life – a new life that they are struggling to find their way in. I would like to just ask that you continue to pray for this region of the world, specifically that the light of God's love and compassion will shine bright in the darkness. I will be sending out a monthly update, or more/less as there is need or I am inspired to do so😊. In between I will try to post short notes on FB (I am sorry those not on FB will miss them). There will be few pictures posted, again I wish to be sensitive to those I am working with and the situation here.

"I pray that our of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge –that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." Ephesians 3:16-19

Cindy