

When I first set foot in Bwindi, in November 2007, it was a tourist eager to discover the silverback gorillas.

As a doctor, the discovery of a “so-called Health Centre” in the middle of this jungle was intriguing! As a radiologist, finding a container with an X-ray table and ultrasound machine was flabbergasting. The tour of the hospital, provided then by Vicky Holt, the head nurse from England, led me to believe that this was a very well organized institution: there were morning’s meetings, teaching sessions and a general will of bettering the care brought to patients...

There was no electricity other than energy provided at an enormous price by a diesel generator.

A surgical ward had been built by a Canadian donor: it had hardly any equipment. There were two doctors, Paul Williams in charge of administration and social medicine (several out-patient clinics such as HIV) and another and only Ugandan, Dr Birungi on the terrain: he acted as internist, surgeon, paediatrician, gynaecologist-obstetrician...and was practically on duty every day....

Could I help? Yes, please: radiology and ultrasound were catered for by a radiographer who would travel 3 hours to reach the hospital on Thursdays, market day, and perform all that was needed, or let us say all that could wait.

I decided to come back with the goal of making the hospital independent in these imaging modalities.

I have been coming back since ... first as a radiologist with a radiographer to teach ultrasonography and the taking of X-rays, then with teams of medical and paramedical staff.

In ten years the health centre has become a fully pledged hospital (2009) with four doctors, over 100 staff members and is catering for a catchment area of over 100’000 people. A nursing school has also propped up and has already provided the hospital with capable nurses, one of whom we have sponsored through her studies.

Buildings have grown all over the place. Electricity is now mainly provided by a dam but the arrival of the national grid is pending! Surgery is now performed by a fully-pledged gynaecologist-obstetrician, sponsored by one of our colleagues (Professor Verena Geissbühler) and a surgeon whom we have also helped through his post-graduate studies. There is a paediatrician, several clinical officers and an only non-Ugandan doctor, a voluntary British internist.

We have sponsored several nurses for an ultrasound course in Kampala. We have brought over medical equipment in two containers and in our luggage over the years and paid for a new radiology building, a gynaecological consultation room and today the extension of the operating theatre.

Contradicting the experience of several colleagues trying to help in sub-Saharan Africa, our experience with Bwindi Community Hospital is exceptional: the will to learn, the efforts to better themselves, the cordiality and loyalty of most of the staff, the special relations we have built up with some of them in particular, have been the engine making

us come back again and again and mobilize all our resources to help this hospital attain its objectives.

We have led several camps : surgical and gynaecological-obstetrical (Dr Kosta Nassiopoulos , Dr Thomas Witzig and Dr Angel Saurina), starting in the very difficult setting of the absence of general anaesthesia: this was initiated thanks to Dr Pierre-André Vuilleumier, completed then by Dr Le Dinh and Dr Katrin Fluckiger and anaesthesia nurses. One camp also included an urologist, Dr Farshid Fateri, making us realize the enormous need to tend to men too! The operating conditions have drastically improved but there is still very much to do for certain gestures to become routine.

The goal of teaching ultrasound has been reached by on site teaching and sponsoring for a school in Kampala. The management of conventional radiology was assured specifically by M. Samuel Grenier who has been teaching several nurses. M. Philippe Besson, from the Philips Company in Switzerland, has recently blessed us with the repair and reconditioning of the Xray machine brought from Germany in our first container.

One our future goals lies in developing orthopaedics after the experience of two successful camps led by Dr Georges Kohut and Dr Remy Boscacci, a specialist in infectious diseases. Physiotherapy teaching was a novelty. These last camps have also led us to realize the crucial need for a performing laboratory with the offer of microbiology, and hopefully, some cytology, needed for the diagnosis of cancer and in internal medicine.

Today, the dynamics of the hospital managed by Ugandan staff is ongoing. The changes brought to what has become a performing hospital are an encouragement for further help by us, whom they have called the Swiss family!

Our ultimate goal, since the beginning, has been to render the hospital independent of foreign staff...as much as possible...

Our dream is come back one day....unneded !

Dr Forat Sadry