

Zimbabwe Beat: Cholera Outbreak

By Kuda Mutyambizi

Despite its current tribulations, Zimbabwe's greatest treasure remains its people. The people on the ground, both local and those who have been inspired from a distance to come and join in the fight for life and dignity, refuse to give up.

Below is an email received on December 24th from Dr Andrew Reid, who practices in Zimbabwe, on his recent experiences treating cholera in Zimbabwe.

'[We are] now running a Cholera Treatment Centre in Chegutu. We started operations last Friday and a team of us was sent in response to an urgent cry for help from the Ministry of Health (MOH) as huge numbers of patients were flooding in from a high density suburb of Chegutu- one night 250 patients came like a tidal wave to the clinic and overwhelmed the 3 sisters on duty!- they saw huge mortality. The outbreak was caused by sewerage being sucked into the water supply of the high density area due to low water pressure and vandalised pipes. The team was mobilized quickly with supplies from Celebration Health and MOH. The team consisted of 6 young doctors and 9 young nurses. We were met by horrific sights and smells on Friday evening-people everywhere severely dehydrated lying in their own diarrhoea- the smell of decaying bodies, cholera stool and chlorine all mixed together. We arrived and started work at midnight and we gave 1200 litres of fluid in 7 hours to the 150-200 patients on site at a Chegutu Polyclinic and saw the mortality come down from 15 people a day to 1 per day. We saved immediately 20 lives. We had doctors putting in cannulas stooping down "knee deep" in cholera stool and nurses racing around putting up Ringers Lactate all night.. People then began as they became well to have faces with thanksgiving written on them- faces of thank you for saving my life- some vocalised that and said thank you for coming. The whole city of Chegutu was so thankful- they poured out free food and accommodation on us and supplied all our needs. There were still large numbers coming in by local ambulances- wheelbarrows!!!! 140 patients were coming in a day!!! (120 discharges a day). We will not forget the first night and the impact of what we saw BUT more than that the IMPACT of what we DID...

The medical students have also risen to the occasion in battling the cholera epidemic, and have been deployed around the city to conduct essential cholera education and prevention programs. Many of these very students whose medical school campus closed in November along with the public hospitals, are themselves in need of food aid.

Well, what can I do, one might reasonably ask.

On the ground, the greatest impact is being made by Celebration Health and Doctors Without Borders (MSF). Celebration Health and MSF have been particularly successful at mobilizing local and international doctors, nurses and volunteers, establishing Cholera Treatment Centers (CTC) around the country. The budget for running a CTC for either of these organizations is approximately \$200,000.00 a month, encompassing medical supplies, training and logistical equipment, food and accommodation for their teams.

More information about the work being done by Celebration Health and Doctors Without Borders to combat Cholera in Zimbabwe can be found at the following websites.

Celebration Health:

http://www.celebrationmin.org/CCI/news_view.cfm?church=All&story_id=54

Doctors Without Borders:

<http://www.msf.org/msfinternational/countries/africa/zimbabwe/index.cfm>

Donations to support their work can be made by sending a cheque or money order to:

Celebration Health

1. PayPal: htwmus@aol.com

2. By phone: call 214 566 2966

3. Cheque: payable to Celebration Ministries (memo- for medical relief)

Mail to: Celebration Ministries

P.O. Box 764707

Dallas, TX, 75376

4- Wire/ Bank Transfer: Celebration Ministries

Wells Fargo Bank

Routing Number: 121000248

Account Number: 8480226409

Swift Code (international transfers):WFBIUS6S

Doctors Without Borders

1. Online: <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/donate/>
 2. By phone: Call toll-free at 1-888-392-0392
 3. Cheque: payable to MSF USA (memo Cholera Zimbabwe)
- MSF USA
P.O Box 5030
Hagerstown, Maryland, 21741-5030

Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights (ZADHR) working with the US based Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) are pushing for Zimbabwean and international governments to acknowledge and respond to the humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe, and the immediate need for aid. PHR's advocacy efforts have galvanized Secretary of State Condeleeza Rice to acknowledge Zimbabwe's dire crisis and begin engaging Southern African leaders towards bold, responsible diplomacy sincerely designed to bring about the recovery of their fellow SADC member, Zimbabwe. Opportunities for advocacy can be found at the PHR website at

<http://physiciansforhumanrights.org/>.

And last but not least, be a voice against injustice, in all its forms, at home and abroad. We may be many miles away from Zimbabwe, and other places where there is considerable suffering, but we are made complicit by our silence and humane by our action.