



Nursing students working in hospitals and communities—changing the landscape of healthcare with competence and care.

UCU Nursing: Ten Years of Praying, Teaching, Healing

by Patty Huston-Holm

According to the World Health Organization, there is a shortfall in health care workers throughout Africa. In 2013, to reach a threshold of 34.5 skilled health professionals per 10,000 people in Africa, approximately 7.2 million more midwives, nurses and physicians were needed. For developing countries, like Uganda, the sustainable health care model is more focused on people than disease. The Uganda Christian University (UCU) nursing program, in its 10th year, represents such a holistic, sustainable model. Recorded in November of 2015, these are snapshot stories of two different days with UCU students working on their degrees in nursing science.

November 4, 2015, Nsambya Hospital (Kampala)

Patient #15627 struggles to breathe. He wheezes from his slightly parched lips with nostrils dripping occasional mucus amidst the sucking from an oxygen-pulling tube. His eyes are open but not registering signals to the brain that, like the rest of him, is waking up on day six after two weeks of life support.

Patient #15627 at this private, Catholic hospital is age 27, has two broken ribs, multiple fractures on the left leg and a hole in the neck. He lies in metallic spring bed Number 15 in a room that separates him and 30 other men only by curtains. His name is Mbogo Francis. For Buteme Olive, a UCU nursing student, on this November day, he is her patient at one of the better hospitals in Uganda.

Olive quickly establishes a relationship with Francis and his two relatives, a 23-year-old sister and a woman, age 38, who has the non-biological, elevated status of "grandmother." Using the soap, water and plastic bowl brought in by the family, the three

women give Francis a bath.

While scrubbing the face, arms, legs, and torso, Olive learns that less than a year ago Francis moved from his central Uganda village of Gomba Mpigi to Salama, a suburb of the capital city of Kampala, to make more money as a boda boda driver. The career change from farming to driving was his fate as a car with a drunken driver slammed into Francis as he drove his employer's bike. Ugandan hospitals report as many as 75% of their trauma accidents are boda boda related.

Francis' father, who has just arrived, smiles slightly as he describes his oldest son of seven children. Before this, he was "always happy," finding most of his delight in soccer and a six-year-old daughter.

Francis' father turns serious as two doctors arrive to deliver updated medical and financial news. Francis needs surgery soon or the bones in the leg will form back together abnormally, and he will be lame for life. They need \$180 to do the operation. Before that, the hospital must have the \$3,500 the family already owes for the triage and daily care of the past 14 days. The driver who caused the accident likely will not pay anything as he has already given a financial bribe to police.

The doctors leave behind a small piece of paper that reinforces their message handwritten on several blue lines. Staring from the paper to Francis and back, the silence from Olive and the family speaks volumes about the poverty that this family shares with roughly 90 percent of Ugandans. The sister



UCU nursing students managing all sorts of obstacles!

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removes a sweat-soiled, adult diaper from the trash. These are so expensive, she explains, that they must only change them if they contain feces.

“We must get him breathing better,” Olive says. She teaches the grandmother how to prop Francis up with her body. “Once every hour, you sit behind him like this and help free the breathing passages.”

Olive reinforces that it is important to focus on what you can do to improve Francis’ health – cleanliness, positive attitude, breathing and prayer. Olive, one of 30 student nurses working in two different hospitals on this day, is a mid-wife who has delivered about 200 babies over 17 years in Kenya, South Sudan and Uganda. The UCU nursing degree she receives in October 2017 will give her added skill to be comfortable and help elsewhere while supporting her two boys, now ages 3 and 5. Her goal is to become a United Nation’s nurse.

Francis’ sister pulls out a blanket from home, placing the covering over her brother’s legs. The father opens a plastic container of rice and, like other visitors, rolls out his palm-leaf mat, sitting cross-legged on the floor to eat by his son’s bedside.

The medical and financial clock is ticking as each day is roughly \$15 more and human bones atrophy and heal badly.

(Note: In a follow up phone call after this visit, Olive learned that the family raised enough money for the surgery, which the hospital agreed to do before the rest of the bill was paid.)

November 12, 2015, Namulaba Village, Mukono

The mood is light as more than two dozen nursing students squeeze into seats on the purple and white UCU bus. The mostly women hold silver boxes of medical kits on their laps. While chatting and laughing, they eat g-nuts, bananas and fried grasshoppers from Mukono town to the less-hurried, muddy

roads of Numulba village. Jemimah Mutabaazi, Head of the Nursing Department and founder of the program, is with them.

This is “community day,” with each student or student group (depending on local language communication ability) assigned a household in this extreme poverty area. Today is the ninth of 12 weekly visits that supplement the UCU on-campus work. With health care evaluation sheets and pen in hand, they exit the bus that stops shortly after a large orange plastic tent that serves as the village church. On rainy days like this one, the most able-bodied and ambitious of community residents – the best sources for the students’ reports – likely will not be home, but out harvesting cassava, maize, sweet potatoes, sugar cane and beans.

“Nurses in Uganda are not just medical people,” Jemimah explains. Repeatedly, as she observes the students work, she asks, “Did you pray with them? Did you teach them proper use of the latrine? Have you shown them how to cook? What do their houses look like?”

From mud-thatched huts to structures of hand-made brick and one structure of cement, the students document where their assigned family members eat and sleep. Cleanliness is the first line of defense against such common conditions as malaria, cholera, dysentery, skin infections and scabies. An unswept floor – even of hard dirt – is mostly symptomatic of ignorance about how sanitation and hygiene relate to health. Dirty dishes with hardened food swarming with flies are a more obvious indicator. Sometimes, family members peel off the rotting food, eat it and get sick.

“Nurses are social workers, teachers, evangelists and health care providers,” Jemimah said. “This means they must develop a relationship with the people first. We must function holistically.”

Women, ranging from age 20 to in the 50s, are the primary health contacts for the UCU nurses. The women, thin and

oftentimes in pain, generally dig their own pit latrines, build their own houses, plant crops and raise and slaughter chickens and pigs for food. A few are men. On this day, a man in his 20s was bare-footed, ankle deep in mud, making bricks to complete his family home.

As the nursing students make their way down forested, rain-soaked, narrow paths, they stop to provide counsel on such matters as the following:

- Feces of pigs that run downhill and impact neighbors' water;
- Treatment for HIV, skin disease and conjunctivitis;
- Improper disposal of rubbish, which attracts rats and curiosity of small children;
- Chickens protected from predators while living in the house with family members;
- Improperly built, aging and flooding pit latrines;
- Children home from school because of unpaid fees;
- Women having children through men outside of marriage because the husband is impotent;
- Lack of funds to go to the hospital and/or get drugs;
- Inability to understand how to take medication for an ailment;
- Healthy people who are lazy and unwilling to work;
- Beliefs in witchcraft;
- Tall, unmowed grass and lack of bed netting to avoid mosquitos;
- Depression;
- Children walking around an unenclosed fire pit; and
- How to balance a starch diet with greens and beans.

A student nurse explained the nutritional value of mixing yams with beans and greens, down to the detail of how to cook without utensils by using the fingers of one hand for scooping, the mixing with clean water, then boiling and serving. On the occasion when meat is available, it is scrapped off the bone with the palm of the hand before cooking. Afterwards, pans and dishes must be properly cleaned and assembled to dry on a raised area constructed from tree limbs.

"When you are in the community, you are expected to do everything," Jemimah said, seated on a bench under a tin roof hammered with the rainy season's downpour. Elevating her voice to an audible volume for a half dozen students joined by non-English-speaking villagers, she asserted, "You are a nurse but you also need to be a friend and a consultant because for these residents you are all they have."

According to Jemimah, talking and listening are critical for Ugandan nurses working in the community. The edge for UCU-trained nurses is the Christian focus.

"Everywhere we go, we pray," she said. "We always evangelize and let them know the reason Jesus died – that He died for them."

Patty Huston-Holm and her husband, Michael Holm, of Canal Winchester, Ohio, USA, served as visiting faculty, enhancing writing skills for a group of UCU faculty and honors students in October and November of 2015. Since 2010, they have sponsored four students for UCU scholarships, hosted two UCU students for US internships and served as visiting faculty for The Standard (UCU's newspaper).

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University Prayer ALMIGHTY GOD, in whom we live and move and have our being, make this University a real community, and may whatever is just, pure, lovable and gracious abound here. Keep for the University an unspoiled name; develop it for wider usefulness; and may we value it as an instrument for bringing glory to your name: through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Word from the Executive Director

Dear Partners,

This picture represents our partnership—Jemimah Mutabaazi and Karen Drake smilingly putting their heart and soul into the development of an undergraduate nursing degree over a decade ago. With support from donors, visiting faculty, Bethel University, foundations, and an endowed scholarship, the partnership that began with two committed women has flourished into a deeply integrated relationship between Uganda Partners and Uganda Christian University.

The end result of more than a decade of partnership and work is a flourishing Bachelors in Nursing Science program, a strong Masters in Nursing Science program (the only one in Uganda available to the public), and two UCU faculty members (graduates from the UCU Masters program) enrolled in a Nursing PhD program (making them 2 of about a dozen Nursing PhDs in Uganda). This is a strategic, successful, capacity building program that is rooted in partnership but whose fruit is hundreds of well-trained nursing graduates who are serving Uganda and East Africa.

Thank you for partnering with us!

Mark L Bartels



Uganda Partners

PO Box 38333
Dallas, TX 75238 USA
Tel: (214) 343-6422
Fax: (214) 292-8538

info@ugandapartners.org
www.ugandapartners.org

Mr. Mark Bartels
Executive Director
m.t.bartels@ugandapartners.org

Mrs. Laura Corley
Administrative Assistant
lauracorley@ugandapartners.org