



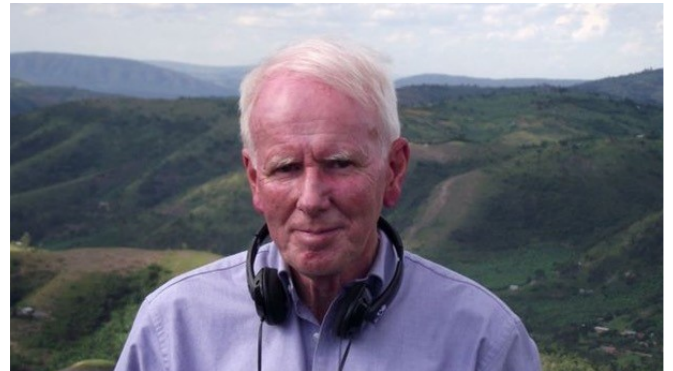
Summer Newsletter 2020

We hope you and your loved ones are staying healthy and safe. In this edition of our newsletter we will update you on how the coronavirus Covid-19 crisis is affecting Kenya and our projects, and how our hospice partners are adapting to cope.

At this incredibly challenging time we are grateful for your support and commitment in helping bring palliative care to people in need in Kenya. Thank you and stay safe.

A reflection on disaster - Mike Wooldridge OBE, Hospice Care Kenya patron

I have spent a good deal of my working life reporting first-hand on disasters. Floods and famines, earthquakes and cyclones, humanitarian crises triggered by conflict – mostly in Africa and South Asia. Some of them were sudden, others – like the Ethiopian famine of the mid-1980s – unfolded slowly and inexorably. But what stays with me is the effects on individuals, and their responses.



In my experience, people show astonishing examples of courage, selflessness and dedication – I have often seen people who are displaced from their homes find shelter with the poorest families. In Mozambique – during famine conditions in the civil war – I met a health worker who risked mines and other threats to walk to a distant town by night to restock medicines for his clinic. The midst of a disaster is truly a humbling place.

Can we compare the responses to these disasters with our response to the unfolding coronavirus pandemic?

In one important respect, I think we can. “Common humanity” is a widely used phrase, so much so that it risks losing its value as a goal to bind us at a time of crisis. But it is an immensely powerful image, best captured by the African concept of Ubuntu, so cherished by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Ubuntu is translated in many ways: “I am because of who we all are”, “humanity towards others” or “a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity”. All these sum it up well. I once heard it said in Africa that you only know what Ubuntu means when it is absent.

We see Ubuntu in much of the response to coronavirus, and hope it will underpin the response of individuals, communities and whole societies as the virus continues its spread. And because we are indebted to Africa for the concept it could help remind us that many African countries and their health systems will be hit - and tested severely - by the virus.

News from Kenya

Like the UK and much of the world, every day life in Kenya has changed beyond recognition. Covid-19 has had a detrimental impact on the ability of hospices to support their patients. Hospices remain open and have introduced rigorous disinfecting routines, but most lack even basic personal protective equipment. A ban on gatherings means that vital services like support groups and day-care have been suspended. Training for health staff and community health volunteers has been postponed. Hospices tell us that their vulnerable patients are very scared. Many fear that restrictions on family members visiting will leave them lonely and isolated; many fear they will run out of pain medication. But together with our partner hospices and the Kenya Hospice and Palliative Care Association (KEHPCA) we are looking for ways to provide care to patients with life-limiting illnesses whilst protecting their fragile health.



All hospices have advised their patients to stay at home with hospice appointments becoming less frequent to protect patients. Our partner, KEHPCA, has secured a small amount of funding to provide some protective equipment for staff to allow essential appointments to continue. Many appointments are being carried out over the phone as regular phone contact can still provide emotional and practical support, whilst protecting the health of vulnerable patients. We are supporting some hospices with the costs of remote appointments.

Last year we supported the training in basic palliative care for this group of community health volunteers from Kajiado County, south Kenya (pictured right during their training).

They are now using their knowledge to educate their community members on Covid-19 and how to protect themselves through hand washing. In these deprived predominantly tribal communities, where literacy rates are low, raising awareness is essential but the remote location, dispersed population and lack of clean water make this a huge challenge.



We helped Nanyuki Cancer Support Group to train a group of 29 community awareness volunteers in December, and will continue to support them to raise awareness of cancer throughout Laikipia County (photo left shows an awareness event which took place in January).

During the pandemic the group is educating communities on Covid-19 and helping vulnerable cancer patients to protect themselves through social distancing.



We support Malindi Palliative Care Unit to care for over 300 patients each year in their homes across Kalifi County (Nurse Sophie is pictured left during a home visit in February). The team covers a large area, often travelling up to 50km over difficult terrain to reach patients who would otherwise go without care and pain relief. Home visits were suspended in March to enable the team to review their health and safety procedures and source protective equipment. Following social distancing procedures where possible they resumed home visits in April to bring vital home-based palliative care to their patients.

Balancing the importance of providing much needed palliative care whilst protecting the lives of hospice patients has become a daily challenge for hospices. Thank you to the palliative care staff and volunteers who are working hard to care for their patients under very difficult circumstances and with increasingly stretched resources.

HCK news

In our last newsletter we asked to hear from those willing to share their journey as an HCK supporter. Meet Gwyn and Iain Sloan. Having spent her childhood in Kenya, the country and its wonderful people are close to Gwyn's heart. As a UK hospice nurse in the 90s, Gwyn heard that the two hospices in Kenya, Nairobi and Nyeri, needed medication and equipment. So bearing supplies donated by UK companies, Gwyn and her musician husband, Iain, visited Kenya. They felt privileged to see first-hand the amazing work of committed hospice staff. It was here that Gwyn met 'Ruth' who asked for help with her distressing symptoms. Ruth told Gwyn of her monthly gruelling 24 hour journey from Malindi on the coast, to Nairobi Hospice to obtain morphine for her pain. The cost of the journey was considerable, and as a mother of young children, Ruth often had to make the decision as to whether she should put food on their table or obtain pain control. The consultation with Ruth lasted four hours but it changed Gwyn's life. From then on Gwyn and Iain have supported HCK at every opportunity, often through charity concerts and charity balls amongst other events. To date, some £55,000 has been donated to Hospice Care Kenya through their fundraising, an incredible achievement which has helped us to improve many lives in Kenya.



Iain and Gwyn are already working hard to organise their next event in aid of HCK. The Charity Concert, taking place at Great Malvern Priory on Saturday 6th February 2021, offers an evening of choral highlights with an international flavour in a stunning venue. Look out for details in future newsletters or find out more on our website events page.

We are delighted to announce that BBC broadcaster and Hospice Care Kenya patron, Mike Wooldridge OBE, is presenting our BBC Radio 4 Appeal next month.

Make sure you listen to our Appeal on Radio 4 on Sunday 28th June at 07:54 or 21:25. You can also hear it on Thursday 2nd July at 15:27.

Please share the date with friends and family and help spread the word!





Photo above: Alfred at home.

Photo below: Hospice nurse Peris demonstrates correct morphine dosage to Alfred's community health volunteer, Kenneth



Alfred's story

Alfred, in his 40s, lives in a small mud brick house with his wife. For six months Alfred had suffered with blurred vision and pain around his eye. He had severe mouth and throat ulcers, had difficulty swallowing, and had lost a lot of weight. He tried to get help and visited several doctors but had only been prescribed antibiotics and paracetamol which didn't help.

His village community health volunteer, Kenneth, heard about his poor health and paid him a visit. Kenneth had recently trained in palliative care with support from Hospice Care Kenya so he knew that Alfred's symptoms suggested something more serious. After a call to the nurses at Busia hospice, Alfred was referred to the correct place for further investigations. At last he received his diagnosis; advanced throat cancer.

Kenneth was able to visit Alfred every day and be on hand whenever he was needed. He helped Alfred to take the morphine prescribed by the hospice which keeps him comfortable and free from pain. He gives advice and comfort to the whole family, just listening to their worries. The hospice nurses are just a phone call away if Kenneth needs support.

Alfred couldn't afford cancer treatment, he died 3 months later, but Kenneth's compassionate care meant that Alfred was comfortable until the day he died, at home with his family, and he knew that Kenneth would be there to help his family cope through their bereavement.

Please help us to provide compassionate care and support to more families like Alfred's.

Just £50 supports a hospice to carry out home visits to patients for a whole month, or can train one volunteer, to make sure that families are not left to cope alone when faced with cancer.

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www.hospicecarekenya.com (Registered charity no. 1141469)

HCK PO Box 491, Scarborough, YO11 9FG

01723 890283

hck@hospicecarekenya.com