

## Press Release

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Some of the staff mentioned may be a/v for interview on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> Feb. We can also supply photos of Dr. Luck and Lovell at work in Africa.

### The RUH and Overseas Links

Staff at the Royal United Hospital have forged a surprising number of links with medical agencies and charities overseas. This has led to a number of staff making trips to teach and offer expertise to healthcare workers in less affluent countries.

**Eye surgeon Doctor Jonathan Luck** visited Ghana in 2006 and is due to return there this summer. He visited Tamale, the capital of the northern region of the country, where he found there was just one Ophthalmologist for a population of over 2 million people. (Here in Bath for comparison we have five eye surgeons for a population of 500,000).

Dr. Luck says he made the trip in order to be challenged: "Here in Britain, we tend to just 'bimble' along in our own comfort zone, and I wanted to get out of that, even for just a short while, and see what genuine need was like. Africa is a bit of a shock – it does, avoiding stating the obvious, make you realize what the NHS does offer. For example – if I tripped over and broke my ankle, within probably an hour at the most I would expect attention from an orthopaedic surgeon, and would expect a proper anaesthetic from a skilled anaesthetist. Afterwards I would get physiotherapy and see the doctors regularly for check-ups.

"In Tamale, there is no orthopaedics, and patchy anaesthesia. There is an obstetrician, and occasionally a paediatrician. So, if I broke my leg over there, assuming that I survived any complications and the attentions of the local healers, my leg would heal by itself, resulting in a crippling injury. There are a noticeable number of young men in wheelchairs because of this. And that's just your leg! If you have eye trouble or Cataract, you go blind – no-one has the money to pay."

There is no NHS in Ghana and Aids and HIV infection are major health issues - about 3% of the population are HIV positive and there were 170,000 Aids orphans in Ghana in 2003.

During his 2 week stay in Ghana Dr.Luck assisted the local eye specialist by providing 40 cataract operations for free (they normally cost 35 dollars and are therefore out of reach of most people). He also brought with him over 300 pairs of glasses donated from the public and collected by the Bath an

**2. Doctor Chris Lovell, a dermatologist**, has strong links with two hospitals in Ethiopia and visited them in November 2007. Aids and leprosy are big problems there. There are only 14 full time dermatologists in the whole of Ethiopia compared to 400 in the UK. All are based around the capital Addis Ababa.

Doctor Lovell is trying to help his Ethiopian contacts set up a skin “patch testing” service to improve the diagnosis of people with complex skin allergies. Patch testing is a service we take for granted here, but it’s not widely available in Africa. It involves putting a number of patches containing 30 or more potential allergens on a patient’s back for a couple of days in order to learn what substances they are allergic to. Common allergens in Ethiopia are rubber (many shoes made out of this) and plants.

A skin testing service is useful for diagnosing patients with certain forms of eczema and for educating patients about avoiding the relevant allergens. When people are not diagnosed quickly, their condition can dramatically worsen and lead to chronic eczema, leg swelling, infection and loss of earnings through ill health. (See attached photos of infected limbs)

Because dermatology services are not readily available in the most rural areas, people with skin conditions are often very ill by the time they do get seen by an expert.

Doctor Lovell is trying to set up a system of medical scholarships to offer Ethiopian doctors the chance to visit the UK for training. He says: “I got a huge amount out of the visit. It was inspiring to teach people who had a genuine thirst for knowledge, as much as to learn from them about conditions which are commoner in Ethiopia than in Bath (e.g. leprosy). I was impressed by the doctors’ enthusiasm, commitment and hard work, combined with their warm friendship. It was a privilege to be able to help them set up and develop their service. I’m looking forward to going back.”

(see pictures attached)

**3. Consultant anaesthetist Doctor Andrew Souter and Specialist Physiotherapist Sarah Ferguson** from the Pain Management Unit in the RUH are active members of SPIN (Specialists in Pain International Network - a small multi-professional group of pain management specialists).

The charity aims to improve education in the field of pain relief by engaging in teaching and lecturing in other countries, especially those less developed than the UK. So far Dr. Souter has visited Romania, Italy and India. Sarah has visited Poland, India and Sarajevo. Sarah says she’s really benefited from the trips: “I’ve learned a lot from working with experts in their field within the UK and abroad and the opportunities to share good practice. I now understand the difficulties of providing pain services abroad, in countries where health budgets are limited and where there are vast cultural differences to the UK.

**4. Specialist trainee in anaesthetics Doctor Rebecca Lesley is very involved with the Kenyan Orphans project**, as are nurses from the Children’s Unit: Bev Boyd, Tracy Curant and Jo Hill. The charity was set up in 2002 and so far a hospital, a health clinic, and a primary school have been established. A large group of RUH staff visited Kenya to work on a voluntary basis last year.

**5. Orthopaedic Surgeon John Cashman** is currently on sabbatical in Malawi for two years. He is doing Paediatric Orthopaedics in Blantyre Hospital, Malawi and also teaching the resident Surgeons there.

**6. Neo Natal intensive care nurse Becca Abrey** has links with Niger and Malawi.

**7. Consultant Respiratory Physician Adam Malin** teaches in Uganda for the Tropical Health Education Trust.

**8. Intensive care consultants Dr's Jerry Nolan and Tim Cook and consultant nurse Julian Hunt** have strong links with both Vietnam and Indonesia. They have just returned from a week long trip where they've been teaching healthcare staff in Jakarta who are treating people with avian flu.

RUH Medical Director Doctor John Waldron says the trust is supportive of these overseas links. "Our staff are very highly skilled and a great asset to the countries they go to. It is also very altruistic of them, as most make these overseas visits in their own holiday time. We are delighted that so many of our staff are outward looking – they always return from these trips with new insights which not only benefit them personally but also strengthen their work in the NHS."

In addition, a group of staff at the hospital are working on forging a permanent link with a specific developing country to foster links between the RUH and health care agencies there. This is being co-ordinated by consultant paediatrician Doctor Steve Jones who has been involved with the Kenyan Orphans charity. He says "the involvement of doctors from this trust with the Kenyan Orphans Charity was a real eye opener for us and led to a wider discussion about further collaborations of this kind. There is a wealth of enthusiasm and experience on our own doorstep which could usefully be channelled into a permanent partnership with a developing country. My hope is that this link would involve staff from all levels of hospital life being able to establish a rapport with colleagues in a very different setting. I certainly believe this will help both staff from both hospitals develop."

## **Ends**

**Issued by Brigid Devlin Communications office: Tel: 01225 82 5849**

## **Editors Notes**

- Dr. Lovell has worked for the RUH for 23 years. He is Assistant Editor of "Community Dermatology", an educational journal which is distributed free of charge to healthcare workers in over 150 developing countries. This journal is entirely supported by charitable donations and Chichester Rotary clubs.

He plans to return to Ghana later this year and says he found the trip both inspiring and humbling.  
(See attached 2 pictures)

- Doctor Jon Luck has worked for the RUH for 13 years.
- A ball is being held in aid of The Kenyan Orphan project in the Assembly Rooms on Sat 15 March. For more info visit [www.kenyanorphansproject.org](http://www.kenyanorphansproject.org)