

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of September 2019 I travelled to London UK to attend the THET Conference held on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> September 2019. During this conference I was scheduled to represent Makerere/ Mulago palliative care Unit and present a poster abstract on work previously carried out in the refugee population in Adjumani district entitled; “An assessment of chronic illness and palliative care need in a South Sudanese refugee population within Uganda.” This would also be a good networking experience especially in developing links to the global health community. It was not my first time travelling to London but definitely my first all by myself via train. I patted myself on the back every step of the way as I changed trains, learned the meaning of southbound and northbound, two or three times moving in the wrong direction and then doubling back but most importantly finally tapping my oyster card at south Kensington tube station on my way to the hotel.

At the hotel I met up with my fellow traveller from Uganda and occasional accomplice in crime Vicky Opia who was scheduled to give the key note address at the conference and had also travelled on her own for the first time from Uganda. It was a wonderful reunion as always when it comes to Vicky with her warm hugs, infectious laughter and out of this world airport adventure stories. Most importantly though, we had to practice for her presentation as she was scheduled to deliver the Day 2 Keynote address. I knew Vicky would be amazing because her passion and conviction is very sincere. Her goal in life is to make the lives of others better, plain and simple. Irrespective of the struggles she has been through, and she makes fun of these all the time, it’s evident in her talk and actions that the world can only get better and she will do her part as far and as long as she can.

But just like all humble and down to earth people Vicky doesn’t see how amazing and inspirational she is and all I had to do was encourage her to tell her stories in her unique way. Indeed when she took up the stage she stunned the audience. She told stories of defiance against oppression even from her own mother, stories of avoiding conflict and then learning how to face it head on after her leadership training course but above all about setting up Peace Hospice Adjumani, the only Hospice in northern Uganda which is providing palliative care community support using bicycles and volunteers. Not surprisingly she did get a standing ovation at the end of her talk and perhaps a few tears as well.

The THET conference was attended by over 300 delegates and sponsorship partners with a special interest in developing sustainable solutions to global health and a unique focus on ways to promote universal health coverage. This conference I must say is like no other conference I have attended before. This one was filled with passion and a frank kindness of heart that I have never experienced before. Good intentions all though and a sincere desire to contribute to making the world a better place with no egos or expressions of the “helper” being better off than the “helpee”. For example this is the first conference I have attended where they highlighted multiple examples of how Africa and other developing countries have helped Europe and the developed world. I learned that collaboration is not competing; collaboration means we are equals working together to achieve a common goal.

There after we travelled to present at the University of Edinburgh Global Health Seminar on Multimorbidity and Palliative care in fragile settings on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2019. At this seminar I was scheduled to present on the work we have recently completed on the chronic illness and palliative care needs in the refugee population in Adjumani district in Uganda. I was also to participate in a group

discussion following the presentation on implications of our findings for global palliative care especially in fragile settings and the impact of chronic diseases including end stage kidney disease in resource limited settings such as ours.

This time with Vicky as my faithful companion we could call ourselves semi-pros in navigating the tube system to catch the Edinburgh train. It almost didn't happen, who knew a train's doors close one minute to departure, we certainly learnt that. The huffing and puffing with heavy suitcases flying all over was worth it at the end of the day because we made it with a whole minute to spare and the scenery on the train was amazing. What a beautiful country! We got off at the Waverly station to hugs and a warm welcome from our lovely host Dr. Liz Grant and then had our first official meeting with the cold. Vicky in particular was stunned having come from Adjumani which is a nice toasty at 19 °C on a bad day. Fortunately Dr. Liz was perfectly equipped with loads of blankets and Dr. Mhoira got us a good bargain for gloves and hats and scarves. Clearly we had grossly underestimated Mother Nature but with all this ammunition we even managed to eat ice cream on the street.

The seminar was another amazing opportunity to share the refugee model of Uganda where host communities and refugees live together mutually benefitting from each other. We heard from the work happening in Bangladesh and the experiences of the Edinburgh University team. I learned that at the end of the day human needs are the similar it's only the circumstances in which they present that differ and the greatest gift we can offer as fellow human beings is to lend a helping hand in whichever way we can, nothing you are able to do is too small.

This trip and these experiences would not have been possible without the immense help from Cairdeas International Palliative care Trust through its funds and friends. Beret for example, accommodated us, cooked us a wonderful dinner and sent us off with packed lunches and an oyster card. Dr. Liz Grant always asking "Are yous Okay" gave me more blankets than I can remember and the key to her home so we can come and go as we please, Mhoira showed us the lochs (I learnt this is means lakes in Ugandan) of her home town, Julia bought us our first "real food" in London and so many others always available and happy to help in any way big or small. May you be blessed beyond measure as you have blessed us and countless many others. Nelson Mandela said "As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same." This is what the community of Cairdeas has done for me and all the lives it has touched intentionally or unintentionally.



Photo 1: All warmed up in preparation for the Global health Seminar in Edinburgh

Photo 2 : Representing the Makerere Palliative care Team at the poster stall of the THET conference

Photo 3: Acclimatized to the cold and enjoying a some lovely Ice cream at Edinburgh Castle



