

EDITORS NOTE

Welcome to this quarter's newsletter.

This issue includes the introduction of point of care viral load testing and Early identification of HIV in children below the age of 2 and Lighthouse's support towards retention of people on ARVs at high burden sites in Lilongwe. In this quarter Lighthouse also recalls the milestones achieved at Martin Preuss Centre in the past ten years.

Enjoy reading

Introducing Point of Care Viral Load and Early Infant Diagnosis at Lighthouse Centers of Excellence

By Miriam Chipanda

With the increasing need to understand client responses to antiretroviral therapy (ART) and immediate diagnosis of HIV infection among exposed infants, The Lighthouse Trust introduced use of point of care GeneXpert machines at Lighthouse and Martin Preuss Centers in December 2016.

The GeneXpert machines together with their cartridges were procured with financial support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), following a partnership discussion between the Lighthouse Clinical Advisor, Dr. Tom Heller, and Dr Peter



Ehrenkranz, Program Officer at BMGF. The machines measure blood plasma HIV-1 RNA concentration (HIV viral load) using nucleic acid-based molecular diagnostic assays in assessing HIV-positive

patients and response to antiretroviral therapy. The GeneXpert is also being used at both sites for early infant diagnosis (EID) by identifying DNA and RNA of the human immunode-

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Lighthouse enhancing ART retention in Lilongwe urban

By Mercy Phiri Mikanda

As part of its commitment to support ART retention in HIV high burden sites, Lighthouse Trust provided 40 bicycles to 8 health centres in Lilongwe urban in March 2017.

Lighthouse distributed these bicycles to Health Surveillance Assistants (HSAs) and expert clients who support ART tracing at Mi-

tundu, Lumbadzi, Area 18, Area 25, Kawale, Chitedze, Chileka and Nathenje health centers where it is prototyping its initiatives from the Centers of Excellence found at Kamuzu Central and Bwaila hospitals.

Layout Kachere, Lighthouse team leader for the prototype program

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Handover of one of the bicycles

MPC: from a concept into a regional pride

By Sam Zimba



February 2011, marked the ten years of successful growth of Martin Preuss Centre, a Lighthouse clinic based at Bwaila Hospital. The clinic has grown from a mere idea into a recognized HIV Centre of Excellence in Malawi and within Southern African Development Community.

Three years after Lighthouse Clinic had been in operation as a tertiary HIV health care provider at Kamuzu Central Hospital, numbers grew and the clinic got more overwhelmed, on the other hand many clients were getting healthier and more stable.

A concept was developed in 2006 to decongest Lighthouse by transferring out the stable patients to a new centre, expected to be easily accessed from every direction of Lilongwe City and have visible integration of services in order to

minimize patient's trips to the hospital for care. This concept begat MPC in 2007.

MPC was set at Bwaila Hospital deliberately to link patients from STI, TB, Antinatal, labour and delivery to HIV testing and counselling as well as ART care. Bwaila hospital has the largest TB registry in the country with about 2500 TB patients per year, 20,000 births per year at its maternity, has provision of STI services within its vicinity and is close to the central bus station of Lilongwe from all directions.

Despite several challenges faced along the way MPC has had significant milestones. The centre has seen an increase of clients on ART from 1,475 in October 2007 to 20,384 in January this year. On top of that, it was the initial site to implement the option B+ Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) in Malawi.

Due to its integration with the TB Centre at Bwaila hospital morbidity and mortality rates of TB HIV co infected patients have reduced at the hospital. Above that, clients accessing this clinic have the advantage of a one stop shop since they are able to access most of the clinical services within Bwaila Hospital.

Executive Director of the Lighthouse Trust Prof. Sam Phiri says that the centre has also attracted a lot of attention because of these successes and its client centered approach. "The government and other institutions have referred the donor community and other renowned people to MPC because it portrays the picture of what Malawi treasures most, the client." He said.

MPC has attracted a lot of prominent people. In 2012, then United States of America Undersecretary of State for political affairs, Ambassador Wendy Sherman expressed her satisfaction on the numbers of women seen through option B+ at the centre and the use of Electronic Data System. Holly Wong, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Office of Global Affairs (OGA) in the US government in 2013 also got impressed with the services provided at MPC and indicated that American people were committed to continue supporting Lighthouse's programs.

MPC was officially opened by late President Prof Bingu wa Muthalika on February 21st in 2007. The centre was named in honor of A German Doctor, Martin Preuss who was working at Kamuzu Central Hospital and was influential in setting up the Lighthouse Trust.

ART retention enhanced in Lilongwe

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says the provision of bicycles is an initiative to complement government's efforts towards achieving the 90 percent target of retention for those who are taking ARVs.

"The prototype program strives to fill the gaps that hinders the government from achieving the 90 90 90 targets. Default to medication is one area that we cannot overlook, hence the distribution of these bicycles" he said.

Kachere explained that ART tracing is done to clients who have

missed their appointment to collect ARVs for more than 21 days, starting with a phone call and later on home visit in order to bring them back to care.

"Earlier on we distributed cell-phones in the eight Health Centers and now we provide airtime every month to support phone tracing as well." He added.

Kachere stressed that Lighthouse chose bicycles so that tracing can be done in the health centres at a manageable cost

that can be sustained even without Lighthouse's support.

On top of the bicycles, Lighthouse has provided 80 mattress to maternity wings in these sites in order to encourage women to deliver at the hospital as opposed to tradition birth attendants (TBA).

Other equipment distributed to the eight health centers includes blood pressure and blood sugar testing machines, chairs, benches and others.

Point of Care Viral Load and Early Infant Diagnosis at Lighthouse

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iciency virus (HIV) in whole blood of infants who are exposed to the HIV virus. One machine, which can take four samples at a time and takes 90 minutes to produce results, has provided the Lighthouse with capacity to do over 15 targeted Viral load tests per day. This means our medical personnel can now take appropriate steps soon after the 90 minutes in assisting clients with high viral load due to ART failure, when there is need to switch to second line ART. The machine also helps to identify those whose ART is still working well in patients suffering from other illnesses and thus prevent unnecessary treatment “switches”. This reduced clinical review time also means clients can

receive results the same day and no longer wait for the next scheduled appointment to know their viral load results.

Shameem Buleya, Lighthouse Lab Technologist, commended the new initiative saying, “The new system is assisting the Lighthouse in providing effective and efficient services. Clients who need to change medication can be assisted in a day and do not have to wait 3 months to the next appointment as previously done.” As for the machines themselves, Ms. Buleya said that they are not very prone to errors, are easy to operate, and produce very reliable results with 100% specificity and 95.6 % sensitivity.

With the construction of the Clinic exten-

sion at the Lighthouse that includes Mini lab space with support from the Friends of Lighthouse - Germany, there are plans to introduce TB testing through sputum test using the same GENEXPERT machines in the near future. This test will be introduced alongside the urine TB test, currently being used, which is more effective in HIV patients of CD4 count of less than 100cells/ul. The Genexpert TB test, which is suitable and sensitive for TB diagnosis in all HIV patients regardless of their CD4 count, looks for the Mycobacterium tuberculosis (the bacteria causing TB) DNA as opposed to the LAM test, which identifies a part of the bacterial cell wall.

Lighthouse Welcomes First Female Director

by *Miriam Chipanda*

The Lighthouse Trust welcomed its first female director in this first quarter of 2017.

Dr. Beatrice Mwangomba joined the Lighthouse on the 20th of February 2017 as a Medical Director.

In her capacity as Medical Director, she will provide medical leadership and strategic medical guidance to Lighthouse Clinics, Community Health Care services, and HIV Testing and Counselling Services both at the central and district level.

Her role will involve the development of strategies and guidelines that maximise impact on quality HIV care for adults, children and Option B+ women while ensuring improved service delivery for clients from enrolment to ART initiation, adherence, and retention in care.

Dr. Mwangomba, who is a Public Health Physician and Epidemiologist moved to the Lighthouse from the Min-



istry of Health (MoH), Clinical Services Department, where she led the Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and Mental Health Unit from March 2012. Prior to joining the MoH headquarters, Dr Mwangomba was a District Health Officer for Thyolo between 2006 and 2010 .

Her most notable achievements

include leading a successful service integration process between the Medecins Sans Frontiers (MSF) and the MoH at district level between 2007 and 2009 as MSF was preparing its exit strategy from Thyolo District; leading the planning and implementation of introduction of HPV (Human Papilloma Virus) vaccine in Malawi through a demonstration project in Zomba and Rumphi districts under the Gavi grant support; and also conceptualizing and leading the planning and grant proposal development and successful application for a Hypertension and Diabetes Control Project for central and northern regions in Malawi under the World Diabetes Foundation grant support.

She is also currently pursuing a PhD in Medicine focusing on “Comorbidity of Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and

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First Female Director at Lighthouse

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Alcohol Use Disorders (AUDs)” with a sub-line of “Validation of an Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test in Malawi” through a PhD Fellowship under the joint Global Health Implementation Programme between the School of Public Health and Family Medicine at College of Medicine, Malawi and University of St Andrews, School of Medicine, in Scotland.

Talking to Dr. Mwangomba, she said she was excited about her new role at the Lighthouse. Saying, “...now that I have joined the Lighthouse, I am looking forward to learning from them and be a part of this center of excellence in HIV care. I particularly look forward to work with them in enhancing integration of chronic care for HIV and NCDs, so we can offer holistic care to all our clients.

We know that although our clients have HIV, with Anti-retroviral treatment successes, people are living longer so we need to take care of the other co-morbidities such as NCDs (e.g. hypertension, diabetes and cancers) as well as alcohol use disorders and other mental health disorders (e.g. depression). And I am excited because the Lighthouse has already started imple-

menting some integration efforts such as screening and management of hypertension within its client cohort”

Asked to say something about her life as a career woman and now a first female Director under the Lighthouse Trust, Dr Beatrice had this to say:

“Being a woman should not stop anyone from serving in any position. Even when in a male dominated career or environment, women should take the male counterparts as colleagues and contribute freely. Although mixing career and family responsibilities is not very easy for a woman, it is important to keep one’s head high in order to soar above the challenges. I had my second child during the Masters’ degree period but I still graduated on time (within 2 years). Now I am studying for a PhD but still have a passion and energy for work. I therefore say, it is possible to advance one’s career while you are a wife, a mother, a guardian to other dependents, a leader in some Christian activities as well as a friend to peers and others. However, I am forever grateful to God, for the ability to handle the multiple facets of life and for giving me strength and ability to overcome emotions every time I feel drained”.

The foundation of success in life is good health: that is the substratum fortune; it is also the basis of happiness. A person cannot accumulate a fortune very well when he is sick. P. T. Barnum

Our Vision

To be a recognised leader in the provision of high quality HIV services and to improve the lives of people affected by HIV

Lighthouse Trust

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Our Mission

The Lighthouse trust contributes to Malawi’s national response to HIV as a model in providing a continuum of high quality care and building capacity in the health sector

LIGHTHOUSE