

Letter to the Editor

Dr Eluzai A. Hakim Response

Dear Editor,

I refer to Dr McIntosh's letter, published in this issue in response to my article, "South Sudan Postgraduate Training Programme" in the SSMJ Vol 19, No 1, February 2026. Unlike Dr McIntosh, I contend that the Link House is a very important facility for supporting training in South Sudan especially in the initial stages of the evolution of the postgraduate programme to accommodate high-calibre South Sudanese specialists living abroad, and trainers from the developed world.

Dr McIntosh makes some very important points which require the attention of the South Sudan Ministry of Health (MOH), particularly regarding the development of a coherent National policy on a medical training programme. Recognising the lack of such a policy in 2008, I initiated the formation of a link between St. Mary's Hospital, Newport, Isle of Wight, and Juba Teaching Hospital (*The Juba Link*). The Link committee in the UK was made up of hospital consultants, senior nurses, a chief operating officer of the hospital trust, the manager of the St. Mary's Hospital Postgraduate Centre, a senior midwife, a hospital non-executive director and two interns. The two interns spent three months at Juba Hospital working alongside South Sudanese doctors for mutual experience. The corresponding Juba Committee was composed of a consultant surgeon, a paediatrician, a paediatrics registrar, and the hospital matron.

The aim of the Link was to harness the expertise of UK trainers to provide structured and regular on-site training for South Sudanese doctors in Juba to reduce costs. In addition, the link provided opportunities for South Sudanese doctors at various levels to visit UK hospitals for periods of six weeks to three months to experience different ways of clinical working in order to influence and, hopefully, improve healthcare delivery in South Sudan.

This scheme attracted much interest from Consultants in the Wessex Region of the United Kingdom, several of whom offered to travel to Juba at their own expense if accommodation was available. Encouraged by this enthusiasm by potential trainers, the Link committee launched a successful fundraising campaign on the Isle of



Wight which enabled the construction of a guest house called **the Link House** (see Figure) to accommodate visiting trainers. The MOH leased a plot of land on the premises of Juba Teaching Hospital where the *Juba Link* built a beautiful six ensuite-room guest house. Several trainers used the Link House on visits to Juba Hospital, saving the government appreciable amounts of money. A memorandum of understanding was signed between the MOH and the Juba Link to conduct trainer visits to Juba. Had it not been for the political upheaval in July 2016, the programme would have blossomed. The Link House was subsequently used for non-trainers as accommodation for hospital medical officers free of charge. This led to its rapid decline structurally without any maintenance! The Link House is available to support future trainers but needs renovation. I have taken steps to reactivate the Link with Juba Hospital through a London Hospital to support the postgraduate programme which I am determined to support.

To realise this objective the MOH must dedicate expertise and resources to developing a robust structured training programme as this cannot be solely achieved through voluntary effort. The Juba Link has ceased to exist through retirements of the trustees and lack of financial support.

Finally, the Consultants currently working at Juba Hospital cannot be bystanders but must bring pressure to bear on the MOH to develop this programme.

Dr Eluzai Hakim, FRCP Edin, FRCP

eluzaihakim@doctors.org.uk