

Health priorities and the new dawn in South Sudan

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South Sudan has come out of a protracted long-standing civil war that has affected its health system and infrastructure. Following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, and the ending of the war, one of the major priorities of the Government remains the need for an entirely developmental approach in building up the health system and addressing the health needs of the population, especially women and children.

Surveys conducted in 2006 and 2010 across the country have reported grim epidemiological and health status indicators. Integral to these poor health indicators is the poor existing health infrastructure and system, shortage of basic health services, and shortage of qualified health personnel to provide quality health services and to train health care workers.

Whilst this lack of skilled personnel applies to all healthcare professions, it is particularly worse among Medical Doctors. The development of a doctor-led progressive health care service requires an active and well-funded Postgraduate Medical Training programme. At present this does not exist at all levels of the health care system, and there are limited trained specialised doctors to provide this programme.

It is for this reason that the Ministry of Health is planning a structured and sustainable Postgraduate Medical Training programme with the assistance of several stakeholders. These include renowned medical institutions such as the St Mary's Hospital, Isle of Wight-Juba Teaching Hospital Link, Poole Hospital-Wau Teaching Hospital Link, and Massachusetts General Hospital with South Sudan links. Although the planned programme is primarily hospital based, it will also support the development of Mid-level Training programmes. Already the St Mary's-Juba Hospitals link has, together with other partners, assisted technically in the establishment of the Juba College of Nursing and Midwifery and this will be replicated in Wau and Malakal. It is expected that over the next 4-5 years, the St Mary's Link Programme will support the training of at least 52 medical specialists within the 15 main medical specialities, so that they can lead local structured training programmes.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Health is establishing a 'Medical and Dentists Council' and a 'Nursing, Midwifery and Clinical Officers Council' to regulate professional conduct and ensure the safety of the public. There is need for a thorough refurbishment of the existing approaches to the establishment and re-organization of the health services infrastructure.

In conclusion, I reiterate that the current health situation in South Sudan is very challenging. However, the Ministry of Health, with the support of Developmental Partners and Friends of South Sudan and with the hope of an increased budget, plans to expand and improve the quality of existing Health Care services and so achieve the Ministry's vision of "A healthy and productive population, fully exercising their human potential"

References:

- Basic Package for Hospital Care Services, Government of Southern Sudan, Ministry of Health, 2010
- Sudan Household Health Survey, SSHS 2006
- Sudan Household Health Survey, SSHS 2010

On July 9th the name of this journal will change to 'South Sudan Medical Journal' .

SSMJ is now listed in the African Index Medicus - see <http://indexmedicus.afro.who.int/> under African Medical Journals.