



WORLD FEDERATION OF NEUROLOGY

“WHERE THERE IS NO NEUROLOGIST”: THE ZAMBIA MODEL

For the past ten years, Dr. Gretchen Birbeck, Director of Michigan State University’s International Neurological and Psychiatric Epidemiology program, has spent six months a year working in Zambia. Despite widespread neurological disorders including epilepsy, Zambia faces a critical absence of neurologists and thus a shortage of neurological expertise. Working with local ‘clinical officers’ in collaboration with local and regional health officials, Dr. Birbeck helped facilitate the development of straightforward, cost-effective training and research protocols that have impacted local health infrastructure and consequently patient care. A user-friendly pictorial manual developed with Zambian health workers as a project component, entitled, *Where There is no Neurologist*, has since been successfully utilized in Malawi and Uganda, and may be seen at: www.msu.edu/unit/neuro/bios/birbweb/page8.htm



FUNDING NEEDS

Dire shortages of physicians—including neurologists—are the rule throughout Africa, even in the shadow of the growing incidence of AIDS-related neurological disorders. African health care professionals see the Zambia model as an efficient and cost-effective means of improving neurological care in their respective regions. Recently, Ethiopian neurologists have requested assistance from the WFN with

systematic training of 100 psychiatric nurses in this protocol. These nurses would subsequently provide a higher quality of neurological care throughout that entire country. Funding is currently needed to expand this successful model both in Ethiopia and other African countries in need.

Financial donations to the Zambia Project will help increase the capacity of African health care systems to improve the neurological assessment, treatment, and care of patients in need throughout Africa.

AFRICA SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

- **“Where There is No Neurologist”**

Project Training of 20 Health Care Workers; Ethiopia
\$2,800

- **Resource Books and Journals, One Country***

\$500

- **Neurology “Tool Kit”**

Basic Medical Equipment Set for African Health Care Workers in Isolated Regions
\$1,200

* Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, Tunisia, Uganda, or Zambia

For more information on these and other tax-deductible sponsorship opportunities, please contact Dr. Carrie Becker at +1(802)558-1640; or Carrie_Becker@Post.Harvard.Edu

Gretchen's own words provide a colorful illustration of this work: *“The most common neurological problem referred is epilepsy although this was not always the case. In 1994, at my Zambian institution, epilepsy was not felt to be a major problem but even a casual observer could note the high rate of chronic fits in our burn unit. People with “kuyumanina” (meaning to fit or have a seizure) remained in the villages, hidden from the public eye to spare the family the associated embarrassment and social stigma. A colleague from Tanzania suggested that word-of-mouth, properly directed, might increase our epilepsy roster. When I began suggesting to patients with epilepsy under my care that they could refer any friends or family, I never anticipated the flood of people responding to the “jungle drums.” Lines formed at my front door on Saturday mornings. Many were exhausted having traveled for days after hearing of the doctor who would treat their problem. Others had traveled alone despite significant disabilities—a foot lost after falling into a plough during a fit, burn contracture—crippling disabilities preventable by medications costing less than \$1-50 per month. Thanks to groups like the Global Campaign against Epilepsy and our own Chikankata Epilepsy Care Team, attitudes towards epilepsy are changing among the populace and the Zambian health-care personnel. We still have a long way to go.”*

Excerpt from *Lancet Neurology* 2002; 1: 58-61. [Personal View: A Neurologist in Zambia](#). Gretchen L. Birbeck.

For more information on this project, see <http://neurology.thelancet.com> Vol 6 January 2007 Profile: Gretchen Birbeck: A Zambia Experience.