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The Whole Picture

Online-only content for “At Work with Malawi’s Nurses,” by Christine Gorman (text) and Eileen Hohmuth-Lemonick (photographs), in the American Journal of Nursing, June 2009, p. 26-30.

▲ **Mphatso Nguluwe likes to tell church gatherings that she is the mother of nine children by eight fathers. When her fellow Christians gasp in surprise, she asks, “Isn’t church supposed to be a place where people can find acceptance?” Now that she has their attention, Mphatso relates that most of the children’s parents have died—some of AIDS, others from accidents. It doesn’t matter—Nguluwe has taken them all in. In addition to being a devoted mother, she is a gifted teacher and has spent many years teaching nursing at the Ekwendeni College of Nursing.**

➔ Catherine Mzembe is an RN who has twice come out of retirement to help address Malawi's nursing crisis. One of her goals is to recruit more nurses to come to the Embangweni Mission Hospital in rural northern Malawi, where she is head of nursing. It's a tough sell, even though the hospital has a good reputation. It is located at the end of a long, dusty road. Local public schools are overcrowded. And there aren't a lot of jobs available for a nurse's spouse. As a result, many nurses at Embangweni are single, widowed, or divorced—or already have ties to the area.

↓ Community health nurse Joyce Ngo'ma listens for a fetal heartbeat at a mobile clinic in Emazwini, Malawi.



➔ For the past decade, community health nurse Joyce Ngo'ma has conducted prenatal exams during monthly mobile clinic rounds in northern Malawi. Prevention, not treatment, is the watchword on these trips. Ngo'ma refers people who need treatment to the local hospital, less than a day's walk away, so care isn't delayed until she returns next month.



↓ Hundreds of women and children wait patiently—the occasional temper tantrum aside—for the mobile clinic to arrive in Emazwini, Malawi.





↑ In rural Malawi, churches are often the center of social gatherings. After a long week working at the hospital, Catherine Mzembe dances with a local choir.



➡ At Embangweni Mission Hospital in rural northern Malawi, nurse Walinase Ndovi takes the temperature of a child who is suspected of having malaria. Over the past five years a combination of education, prevention, and treatment efforts has dramatically decreased the death rate from malaria among children in this area.

➔ Nurse Monica Mwale bicycles several kilometers a day to and from the hospital where she works in northern Malawi. It's dusty in the dry season and extremely muddy in the wet season, but the houses closer to the hospital don't provide enough room for her family. Imagine trying to transport a patient needing abdominal surgery over these same roads.



↓ At the new DaeYang-Luke hospital just north of Lilongwe, Malawi, Abigail R. F. Bonongwe attaches a patient identification bracelet to young Eneless Gilbert, who is suspected of having malaria.



➔ After finishing a shift at the hospital, Emma Kapatuka bathes her daughter, Lisa.



↓ Even without fertility drugs, the birth of twins is surprisingly common. Madalitso Chosalowa, a nurse midwife technician at Embangweni Mission Hospital, tends to one newborn while the other is still being delivered via cesarean section. Both children are healthy.



➔ Nurse midwife technician Jane Chibaka delivers a healthy baby at Embangweni Mission Hospital. Although Malawi's national guidelines call for at least two health care workers per shift on the labor and delivery ward, the nursing shortage means that Chibaka is alone today.



↓ Another reason nurses are often reluctant to take posts in rural Malawi: public schools in the countryside, like this one, may not have as much to offer as those in larger cities and towns.





↑ Four nursing students prepare for their day at Mulanje Mission Hospital in southern Malawi. From left to right they are Fashion Reuben, Malani Munthali, Thoko Mlozeni, and Christopher Nazombe.

➔ Nyayeke Mhango, a nurse midwife technician, cares for a patient on the women's ward at Embangweni Mission Hospital. If Mhango proves her worth, the hospital will sponsor her further education.



➔ The work is never finished. After completing a shift at the hospital, nurse midwife Dorothy Nyirongo chops wood before cooking dinner over an open fire.

⬇ Quick rule of thumb for figuring out a hospital's reputation in Malawi: do staff members take their own family there? Here, nursing student Fashion Reuben tends to his grandmother at Mulanje Mission Hospital in southern Malawi.





◀ The crowd is all ears as Matilda Nyambo conducts a lesson in female reproductive biology. Nyambo is a nurse at Neno District Hospital in southwestern Malawi, which is jointly operated by Malawi's Ministry of Health and Partners in Health, a Massachusetts-based nongovernmental organization. Partners in Health works with local governments in rural areas to attract more health workers to the public sector.

➡ Nursing student Dorothy Banda clears an iv line of air at Mulanje District Hospital. Nurse midwife technicians in Malawi follow a three-year course of study after graduating from high school. They must demonstrate a solid grasp of science and math before being admitted—something that isn't easy, given the shortage of science and math teachers in high schools.



◀ In Malawi, RNs like Mary Mwafurirwa (left) are often tapped for administrative rather than clinical positions. That doesn't stop Mwafurirwa, who is in charge of maternity at Embangweni Mission Hospital, from showing Jane Chibaka, a nurse midwife technician, how to prepare a chlorhexidine solution for use during vaginal examinations. ▼