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International Outreach continues St. Joseph's Sisters mission to poor

BY VANESSA SANTILLI
Catholic Register Special

Dr. Clement Okello is one of only three hematologists in Uganda. With a population of 35 million, it's an overwhelming workload. As a Roman Catholic, Okello says his service as a doctor is an extension of the healing mission of Jesus.

"I derive my strength from seeking Him in prayers."

Through St. Joseph's Health System's International Outreach Program, Okello has been given the opportunity to further his knowledge of hematology, the study of blood-related diseases, as an advanced level of training isn't available back home.

"I will now be able to provide better care to patients," said Okello, who works at the Uganda Cancer Institute at Mulago Hospital in Kampala, the country's capital city.

Founded 30 years ago, the International Outreach brings doctors from Uganda, Haiti and Guyana to train in Hamilton, Ont. There, doctors learn the latest in Canadian medicine to help improve patient care in their home countries.

In 2016, a total of eight doctors



Dr. Peace Bagasha, a Ugandan kidney specialist, is furthering her training through the International Outreach Program of St. Joseph's Health System.

from abroad will take part: five from Uganda, including Okello, and three from Guyana.

The program also sends Canadian doctors abroad to train local doctors, partnering with

universities, medical schools and teaching hospitals in countries that need more specialists.

Since the program's creation three decades ago, more than 100 physicians have been trained, said Alan Sharpe, director of development at International Outreach.

The missionary spirit of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Hamilton — whose motto is "It is a privilege to serve the poor" — lives on through the program, he said. The sisters had an emphasis on serving the poor and sick, regardless of race, gender, religion or social status.

"We train physicians regardless of their ability to pay," said Sharpe. "We cover the expense of bringing the physicians to Canada and we pay for their stay while here. We do not charge them for their training."

Another physician currently training in St. Joseph's Health System in Hamilton is Dr. Peace Bagasha, who works as a nephrologist in Uganda — a specialist in kidneys.

In Uganda, where she works at Mulago Hospital, she said that end-stage kidney disease, treatable in Canada via dialysis or a kidney transplant, is equivalent to a death sentence.

"This is because they cannot afford dialysis," said Bagasha. "Because of the limited nephrologists, there is very scanty chronic kidney disease care available to patients."

When she wraps up her time in Hamilton in June, Bagasha hopes to be able to implement holistic kidney care in Uganda.

"I want to teach medical school residents about kidney diseases and maybe one day we might be able to set up this model of a fellowship program so it can be available to more Ugandans."

Like Okello, one of the greatest challenges in Uganda is serving a massive patient volume with very limited resources — so she's grateful for the opportunity to hone her skills.

"This experience has given me exposure to an advanced health care system that is very efficient in ensuring excellent patient care and followup so they don't fall through the cracks," said Bagasha. "I have really appreciated the value of co-ordination in bringing all the players in the health care system together."

(Santilli is a freelance writer in Toronto.)

THE PERSON ON THE RIGHT IS LEARNING HOW TO SAVE LIVES FROM THE PERSON ON THE LEFT THANKS TO SOMEONE LIKE YOU.

You're looking at a Canadian surgeon training a Haitian doctor in the operating room of a rural hospital in Haiti. The Canadian doctor is a volunteer with the International Outreach Program of St. Joseph's Health System. He volunteers his time and expertise to train doctors in developing countries.

Thanks to the generous donations of people like you, this Haitian doctor is learning the latest procedures in diagnosis, surgery, medicine and patient care. What he learns today, he'll employ for years to come with his own patients. Plus, he will pass on what he learns to other Haitian surgeons. That's the power of training a doctor from a developing country. You train him today, he saves countless lives tomorrow.

Your generosity makes this life-saving work possible, in South America, Africa and the Caribbean. The International Outreach Program of St. Joseph's Health System is a non-profit organization that saves lives in developing countries by training and equipping their doctors, nurses and other vital health workers. We send teams of medical professionals from Canada to our partner countries to deliver training, medical equipment and supplies. And we bring medical students and doctors from these same countries to Canada for training. Your financial support makes this possible. Please give generously.

Your gift saves lives in poor countries by training and equipping their doctors and nurses. PLEASE GIVE NOW.

Donate at www.internationaloutreach.ca/savelives

or mail your gift to The International Outreach Program of St. Joseph's Health System, 50 Charlton Avenue East, Hamilton ON L8N 4A6



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