

AIDS Portion of TLC Bush Clinics Grows with Assistance from Afar

August 15th, 2008



Lions Harry and Echo needed help rolling out The Luke Commission's expanded HIV/AIDS program. Five young women from Cedarville University needed a place to do their summer missions' nursing.

Enter God, who put it all together in July, 2008. No fuss, no bother. A perfect match for His glory and for the benefit of the Swazi people.

"We have wanted to offer more help to HIV-positive patients for some time," said Lion Dr. Harry VanderWal. "Lion Echo and I knew we should start drawing blood right out in the bush before those infected leave the clinics to expedite their access to treatment."

In the past several months, the VanderWals have tackled governmental policy, cultural superstitions, and just the practical prerequisites of effectively treating people with HIV.

Swaziland has the undesired distinction of being the country with the highest HIV/AIDS rate in the world. We have watched whole families die, one by one over the period of a few years. Most are young adults whose children are infected and left as orphans.

The Luke Commission has to do more than just test and counsel, the VanderWals reasoned.

"We were all ready to implement the improvements, but lacked some on-site medical personnel," said Lion Echo. "Lion Harry and I can handle it, once the new procedures are set up and the logistics are ironed out. But the clinics have become so large; we needed help launching the expansion."

Meanwhile - you've all experienced how God likes to work through our "mean whites" - four nursing students and a nursing supervisor from Cedarville University in Ohio were disheartened. Their summer medical missions' trip to Zimbabwe had been cancelled. Heightened political unrest spelled too much danger.



"Then we found The Luke Commission," said Rebekah Sartori, 24, the nursing supervisor who was graduated from Cedarville University in 2005.

"I have a different view of medical missions now," she noted. "The bush clinics, everything being free, things done differently than the traditional way - it doesn't have to be done the way it's always been done before."

"I have been so blessed to see the passion that the VanderWals have for the mobile clinic ministry here in Swaziland." Rebekah continued. "I hope and pray that the Lord will ignite in me a passion like I see in them - a passion to know Christ and make Him known!"



Now a pediatrics and labor and delivery nurse in Corbin, Kentucky, Rebekah enjoyed working in the Manzini hospital on days TLC was not in the bush. "The really neat thing about being in Africa is that nurses can deliver babies. I loved watching my students deliver their first babies."



Kara Lindemann, 22, from St. Louis, Missouri, initially felt emotionally

drained when ministering to the HIV-positive patients out in the byways of Swaziland. But all that changed.

"At first I thought the horrible circumstances were devastating," Kara said. "But now I realize how important it is for people to know if they're positive. Then they can be advised of possible treatments that will extend their lives."



The four American students, all in their last year of nursing school, drew blood from HIV-positive patients, so CD4 counts could be determined. That's the first step toward receiving anti-retroviral drugs.

As Lion Harry explains to the crowds at each clinic, "If you get tested and face the problem, you can get help and live to raise your children. You may not even feel sick right now. If you wait until you do feel sick, it might be too late."

Kara learned not to rush, to show compassion, to encourage those who tested positive, to "just be there and be real with them," she said. "We gave all HIV positive patients a SiSwati Bible and a small gift. Their faces lit up over something so simple. And we were able to pray with them."



"Swaziland has been an eye opener," said Lauren Hawker, 21, from Jackson, Ohio. "I hid behind things in the States; here I've had to rely on God completely."

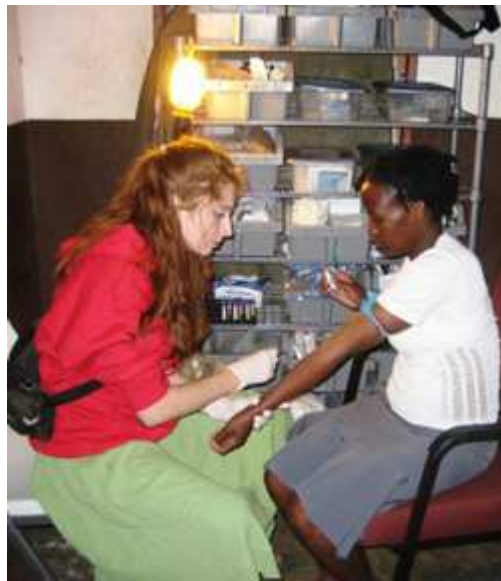
How did she hide? "I'm materialistic. I am a spoiled young person. I always knew I was fortunate, but now I am even more grateful for my family," admitted Lauren. "Here I realize what is important, and what's not. I've seen people with nothing be joyful. Things do not make you happy."

Lauren remembers the evening she was passing out toys in the hospital. A mother gave birth to a baby that wasn't breathing.

"I've had a hard time praying aloud. That night was a turning point. All I could do was pray with the mother for close to an hour while Lion Harry and another doctor tried to resuscitate the baby. I prayed and cried with her," Lauren said.



What will she do differently back home? "I'll get involved with more ministries and more missions' organizations. And I'll pray out loud," answered Lauren.



Twenty-year-old Amanda Martin of Rome, New York, said The Luke Commission bush clinics are "such a drawing card. It's liberating to be able to share the Gospel with so many people."

One person Amanda will not forget was a beautiful young woman who tested positive for the HIV virus. "She was my age and so sad. I had to console her."

Amanda "is still processing the conclusions" about her trip to Swaziland. "This is what I was born to do." she noted.



"I feel free here, so satisfied," Amanda said. "I've experienced Jesus' name being lifted higher in the midst of sickness and death."



Tiffany Schlueter, 20, from a small town outside of St. Louis, thinks "it's helpful to see people in different circumstances, to remove things that occupy our minds back home, and to reset priorities."

Besides drawing blood for CD4 counts, Tiffany stuck Swazis' fingers to read their sugar levels, took blood pressures, prayed with patients before they saw Lions Harry and Echo, ran the auto refractor (donated by the Lions of District 1-F) in the eyeglass department, and played with the kids. "My time in Swaziland has been everything I imagined and more."

Tiffany said, "This is exactly what Jesus commands us to be doing - taking care of people."



And so as The Luke Commission continues to care for the physical and spiritual well-being of thousands of Swazis, please continue to pray and to give on this side of the world.

Please pray specifically for the VanderWals and their national team as they attempt to keep in touch with all the HIV-positive patients met at the mobile clinics who want to fight this painful disease. Pray anti-retroviral drugs will be available month by month.



"...It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick..."
Mark 2:17