



CENTRAL AFRICA MEDICAL MISSION May 2022



When Beth and I were living in Malawi back in the early 1980's polio was very real. In 1980 Malawi reported around 50,000 cases, and the devastating effects of the disease with its paralysis could be seen just about anywhere we travelled. Major vaccination efforts were already underway and gradually polio came under control, so that in 2005 Malawi was declared polio free.

Polio vaccination has been part of our under-five's vaccination schedule for many years. By the time children are 5 months old they will have received 4 oral doses and one injection. Vaccination rates in Malawi are believed to be over 90%. The fight against Polio was so successful that MAP -Malawi Against Polio, the organization that championed vaccination and provided support for Polio patients morphed into an agency called Malawi Against Physical Disabilities whose aim is to help people of all ages with disabilities towards independence. They focus particularly on those with mobility problems and those suffering from polio, paralysis, paraplegia, tetraplegia, hemiplegia and other disabilities.

You can imagine our surprise when in February this year the Malawian government announced an outbreak of Polio. Here are some excerpts from a local news article:

"Health authorities have declared an outbreak of wild poliovirus type 1 after a case was detected in a young child in the capital Lilongwe. This is the first case of wild poliovirus in Africa in more than five years."

"Laboratory analysis shows that the strain detected in Malawi is linked to the one that has been circulating in Sindh Province in Pakistan."

"Following the detection of wild polio in Malawi, we're taking urgent measures to forestall its potential spread. Thanks to a high level of polio surveillance in the continent and the capacity to quickly detect the virus, we can swiftly launch a rapid response and protect children from the debilitating impact of this disease."

"Any case of wild polio virus is a significant event, and we will mobilize all resources to support the country's response," said Dr Modjirom Ndoutabe, Polio Coordinator in the WHO Regional Office for Africa."

Malawi Government agencies are stepping up their efforts to vaccinate and revaccinate children. Government Health Surveillance Assistants have been going door to door with the polio vaccine and The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), has been providing solar powered refrigerators to clinics in rural areas to store polio vaccine, including one that was recently installed at our Msambo clinic. In Zambia the government declared poliomyelitis week as a precaution because of the Malawian case, and our Mwembezi staff have been going door to door as part of a polio vaccination program.

Most of our staff has never treated a polio patient. Today we were fortunate to have Dr John Podgore, from the University of North Texas Health Science Center where he is a professor who specializes in Pediatric infectious Diseases, provide an in-service to our staff in how to recognize the symptoms of polio and methods to limit the spread.

The Central Africa Medical Mission cooperates with government agencies to carry out preventative and treatment health initiatives. Our staff share monthly statistics and attend government review sessions to ensure our work is in line with the needs of the communities we serve. Our medical focus may change due to current initiatives, but our mission remains the same: to support the Gospel mission by communicating Christ's love as we show caring concern to the people we serve.

"Heal the sick who are there and tell them the Kingdom of God has come near to you" Luke 10:9

Gary Evans
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