

Improving Care for Trauma and Surgical Illness in Rural Uganda

Kiwoko Hospital is a rural non-governmental hospital situated 50 miles north of Kampala in Uganda. With limited facilities and finances, it serves a population of approximately 500,000 in the region known as the Luwero Triangle where about a third of the population was killed during the 1981-86 civil war. Local people are mainly subsistence farmers, and poverty in the area is increasing due to a fall in the price of cash crops and an increase in crop disease.

As a general surgeon, the aim of Skillshare International development worker Stephen Bennett's placement is to work alongside local doctors, helping them to develop appropriate surgical skills and building the hospital's capacity to treat illnesses and injuries.

After the first three months of his placement at Kiwoko, Stephen has identified several areas where skills can be developed and care can be improved. *"There have been several small changes within the operating theatre environment, and informal teaching of surgical techniques. It has also been possible to deliver of lectures and tutorials to staff at the hospital and associated nurse training school."*

Stephen in surgery, ©Skillshare/Stephen Bennett

In theatre, Stephen has introduced new procedures to improve safety for both patients and staff. *"Each operation now includes a swab, needle and instrument count to reduce the possibility of something being left behind in the patient, and I have sourced a new suture with a blunt needle designed to reduce needlestick injury to surgeons and assistants."* He is also working closely with anaesthetic technicians to develop their skills in spinal anaesthesia; *"this is a way of providing pain-free surgery without resorting to putting the patient to sleep. It requires training and supervision, but should then be self-sustaining as senior technicians pass their skills to juniors."*



In the ward setting, Stephen identified that antibiotics were being over-used, which is costly for patients and the hospital, and could result in the development of drug-resistant bacteria.



Stephen explains, *"I am currently auditing antibiotic use in Caesarean section – our most common operation – and will be producing a protocol to help guide post-operative use of antibiotics."* He has already seen a reduction in unnecessary prescribing. Stephen is working with his colleagues to introduce a range of other improvements including colorectal procedures, fracture plaster, trauma management, a resuscitation room and the development of a major incident plan.

Patients at Kiwoko, ©Skillshare/Stephen Bennett

In the remaining nine months of his placement at Kiwoko Stephen hopes that his work *"will improve the skills of the local doctors and other healthcare workers in this poor area of Uganda. My aim is to leave in place mechanisms for these skills to be passed on to future staff, so that the facilities of the hospital will be improved and the capacity to treat injuries and surgical illnesses will be increased. Ultimately the local population have many healthcare needs, and many more of these should be met as a result of my year at Kiwoko Hospital."*