



Nicci Maxwell

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Location: South Sudan



What I do: Providing paediatric and neonatal medical care to local and refugee communities, and training and supporting local paediatric teams



Empowering people pushed to the edges of life to reach their God-given potential

Dear friends,

It's link letter time again! They seem to come around very quickly!

It's the middle of the dry season in Juba and it's been very hot and very dry. We hadn't seen rain since early November and weren't expecting any until March at the earliest but we had a lovely storm and some wonderfully refreshing rain earlier this week. It was so welcome because it cooled things down a bit for a day or two after three or four weeks when daytime temperatures have been around 40°C.

Strangely, despite that unexpected rainstorm, the weather is probably one of the most predictable parts of daily life in South Sudan at the moment! The unpredictability and uncertainty of life here often causes me to remember one of my favourite CS Lewis quotations. In a letter to a friend, he wrote, "The great thing, if one can, is to stop regarding all the unpleasant things as interruptions of one's 'own,' or 'real' life. The truth is of course that what one calls the interruptions are precisely one's real life – the life God is sending one day by day." There have been a lot of "interruptions" in recent weeks and plenty of changes of plan, some more controlled and others rather more last-minute.

I had some advance warning of the departure of one of my medical officers at Al Sabbah for a new life outside South Sudan, but her departure was rapidly followed by a more unexpected, complete change of all the medical staff, apart from me, within 48 hours! Just when I was getting to a place where I knew the skills of my registrar and medical officer and we had developed a bit of a routine to compensate for the change of interns every fortnight, that little bit of predictability vanished. It's going to take a while and quite a bit of work to get the new team established. Do pray that we will soon have a more consistent and reliable team on the unit for the sake of the babies.

Oxygen and electricity have also been interrupted rather more frequently lately. Our new oxygen plant developed a very sudden problem with its power supply and had to close for a couple of days, which meant there was no piped oxygen to the ward and no cylinders could be refilled. That was manageable because we changed over to electrically powered oxygen concentrators... until the solar electricity system developed an issue, which left us without power and oxygen for several, thankfully short, spells each day.



New toys – our new ultrasound machine got its first outing

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**With Jesus
With each other
To the edges**



A recent morning ward round was “interrupted” by the arrival of a very sick newborn baby boy. He was barely breathing, dehydrated and severely jaundiced but responded well to our resuscitation efforts and we managed to find him some oxygen, even if his “bed” was a plastic chair for a little while. We had taken possession of a donated bilirubinometer (“jaundice meter”) and a phototherapy light less than an hour earlier so we were able to offer him good quality diagnosis and treatment. God’s “just in time” provision really is marvellous!

My trips to Gorom have been repeatedly interrupted too – cancelled is probably more accurate – because the NGO that I am supposed to travel with every week keeps forgetting

to pick me up, despite reminders. It’s very frustrating! I have still managed a few visits and it’s a joy to see some of my regular patients doing well. Sadly, the cuts to UNHCR funding mean that my refugee children with sickle cell disease (five children that I know about) can no longer receive the medication they need to try to keep them healthy and out of hospital and my teenage diabetic patient went without insulin for three days in January. Thanks to some great teamwork and kind friends, both of these situations have now been resolved, at least for the next few months. Do pray that all six of these special children will be able to remain well despite the hardships of refugee camp life.

Another last-minute change of plan meant I spent a couple of hours in the Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF) offices near the airport very early one morning before going work at Al Sabbah. MAF and OVCI la Nostra Famiglia (Organismo di Volontariato di Cooperazione – an Italian NGO) work together to take children from South Sudan for neurosurgery in Uganda. On a previous flight, a child had become unwell so, two days before the next flight, the Ugandan team asked if I could review all the children’s fitness to fly at check-in. It was a fun and busy morning as I examined a whole planeload of children before they boarded their 7.30am flight.

Even though life in Juba is uncertain and the security situation continues to be rather precarious, there are still a few people who choose to come and live/work here or pay us a visit. We have welcomed (and been spoiled by) visitors from the UK, Ireland and Germany and new neighbours from New Zealand, the UK and the Netherlands. Sadly, the new arrivals are somewhat outnumbered by the departures, as people who have been here for a long time move on to new roles or retirement. I suppose that’s one of the more predictable things about my life – there will always be someone saying goodbye!

And with that, it’s goodbye until my next letter. Don’t forget that you can keep up with my latest news on my blog.

Every blessing,

Nicci



Photos from top to bottom: New toys – visitors Lea and Akol pose with staff members Nako and Jackson and our new equipment to diagnose and treat neonatal jaundice; pre-flight checks for our hydrocephalus patients completed so I got a cuddle with one of our little patients (photo credit: Jenny Davies, MAF); late afternoon sunshine in Juba from a friend’s rooftop terrace; a bit of peace and quiet – a brave waxbill enjoying my new birdbath early one morning



Empowering people pushed to the edges of life

It builds my faith when I hear stories from other CMS partners working with people pushed to the edges of life. I hope that you’re inspired as you read about Elinaja in Tanzania who is earning a living for his family thanks to new skills he learned at a CMS project. Read his story and others, at churchmissionsociety.org/empower