



ZIMBABWE
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Circle Care Center and Dr. Paola Greiger work with Dr. Cleophas Chimbetete to create programs that train nurses and medical providers near Harare and throughout Zimbabwe on comprehensive HIV treatment and prevention so that patients can be properly diagnosed and treated. A separate part of this program helps to fund orphans, those under the age of 18 who are living with HIV, for school supplies, books and uniforms. Additional funding provides scholarships to medical students at the University of Zimbabwe.

These programs are important in a country that still maintains an unemployment rate of over 90% of the population, resulting in a lack of financial resources for education. In the last four years, the training program has educated more than 2,000 doctors, nurses and other medical professionals about how to properly diagnose and treat patients living with HIV. The biggest challenge facing the community is stigma and medicinal compliance as a result of that stigma. Additional issues are a lack of education and local medical care. Some of the trainees travel long distances to attend these trainings, using public transport for which they are reimbursed for transport money.

Circle Care Center programs additionally fund about 70 children under the age of 18 who are living with HIV. Many of the children contracted HIV through birth and have been left behind following the death of their parents, divorce or parental split up, or due to a parent's inability to care for their children. Many grandparents take on the roles of parents and take care of the babies while the parents find a way to provide for themselves and, if possible, for their families. Circle Care Center grants directly fund medical care for these orphans as well as most aspects of their education, including school fees, books, and uniforms. This funding helps to provide the children with educational needs, and they are able to see a healthcare worker when needed. They are also able to get lab tests 1-2 times per year to check their HIV viral loads.

Dr. Greiger, along with Circle Care Center CEO Anthony Crisci, consultant Stephen Lucin and humanitarian Dr. Gail Agnant recently visited Zimbabwe in September, 2024, to observe and document the impact that funding has on the orphans and children of the Makumbe District outside of Harare, the impact that trainings have for community medical professionals in the town of Epworth and to learn about the direct impact that scholarship funding has had on medical students attending the University of Zimbabwe. Many of those findings are included in this report.

“I want our patients to know that by using our health centers, they are not only receiving high-quality care and its associated benefits for themselves but also literally helping many other people locally and abroad to access the same life-changing and life-saving treatments.”

-Anthony Crisci
CEO, Circle Care Center



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Makumbe District

Community Reception



The road to the village of Makumbe took more than 90 minutes to traverse. As we reached the outskirts of Zimbabwe's capital city of Harare, we were met with sections of pothole-infested streets and long stretches of dirt roads. Dr. Cleophas Chimbetete skillfully navigated the treacherous, meandering roads while also bringing attention to the obstacles faced by commuters on a daily basis and by medical personnel who are unable to access patients or medical resources in case of an emergency.

Upon reaching the campus of the Makumbe District Hospital, we were met with smiling faces, song, dance and a very warm reception by community members gathered together near one of the buildings. The older female community members even laid down cloths at the feet of Dr. Paola Greiger and Dr. Gail Agnant as they made their way from the car to the shaded seating area. Beautiful Jacaranda trees surrounded the area with their unique purple blossoms and the faint smell of fires in the distance added to the distinct scent so common throughout Zimbabwe. The sun was in full force, the temperature maintained a comfortable 72 degrees while the sky was as blue as could be.

Singing continued for some time before the head nurse and community health worker, Stanford, called everyone's attention in order to begin with the program. Various community members of all ages stood before the visiting group of Americans to thank Circle Care Center for their generous donations which helped schoolchildren afford books, tuition, school supplies, uniforms and access to life-saving healthcare. Many individuals spoke in their native language, Shona, and had their words translated by Dr. Chimbetete.

One of the recurring themes from the speakers was the impact that funds from Circle Care Center had on many of the children in the community, especially orphans and those living with HIV. These children are now able to associate with other children their same ages and find meaning on a day-to-day basis. They have been given hope as well as the ability to pursue an education. Parents and caretakers were so thankful for all of the aid they have received and that which they will continue to receive.

Makumbe District

Circe Care Center CEO, Anthony Crisci, is greeted warmly by a young lady grateful for the support that she is receiving for her young children.



Dr. Cleophas Chimbetete receives a joyous welcome by a mother who also delivered a speech thanking Dr. Greiger, Dr. Gail and Anthony for their support of the children in the community.



Makumbe District



Makumbe District

Hospital Tour



HIV treatment is available through the support of the Global Fund and other international donors.

The Circle Care Center team was taken for a tour of the Makumbe District hospital following the community reception. Leading the tour was a local hospital doctor and we visited the male, female and children's wards. We also toured the outpatient department.

One of the patients had Cryptococcal Meningitis and needed treatment which was not available at the hospital. His situation highlighted the critical shortage of life-saving medicines in the hospital. HIV treatment is available through the support of the Global Fund and other international donors.

The hospital requires assistance with basic medications and clean bedding for patients.



GOVERNMENT OF ZIMBABWE
Ministry of Health & Child Care

MAKUMBE DISTRICT HOSPITAL

MATERNITY

STAFF RESIDENTS

FCH

DENTAL UNIT

PHARMACY

OPD

ADMINISTRATION

MEDICAL WARDS

REHAB DPT

LABORATORY

X-RAY

KITCHEN

PHARMACY STORES

STAFF RESIDENTS

MORTUARY

Prescription medications were labeled as priority needs, though clean bedding, antiseptics and other medical supplies seemed to be priority from outside observation.

MALE & FEMALE WARDS

The team visited the male and female ward where several patients of diverse ages were in recovery from various ailments or burn wounds. One patient, a toddler, was in good spirits despite having had boiling water accidentally spilled on him a few weeks prior. There was a concern about infection due to a lack of gauze and general medical supplies to prevent exposure of open wounds to germs and bacteria.

CHILDREN'S WARD

The children's ward had mothers with their babies who were being treated for various conditions. The lack of air circulation, clean medical supplies and clean beds were of noted concern.

RECORDS ROOM & PHARMACY

The records room of Opportunistic Infections (OI) had many files, as the hospital uses a paper-based records system. This makes it difficult to trace patients who miss clinic appointments. Prescription medications were labeled as priority needs, though clean bedding, antiseptics and other medical supplies seemed to be priority from outside observation. The pharmacy appeared sparse, and medicines seemed difficult to secure.



University of Zimbabwe School of Medicine and Health Sciences

Scholarship Recipients





The Circle Care Center team met with scholarship recipients Molly, Blessing, Matthew and Nobert from the University of Zimbabwe School/Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences. Dr. Chimbetete asked each student to introduce themselves and to give a brief description of how the scholarship funding has helped them. Each student spoke softly and discussed their educational tracks and hurdles to obtaining the funding necessary to afford their tuition, books, transportation, housing and nutrition. They have one year of medical school remaining out of the six-year requirement. One female and two male students received funding directly from Circle Care Center, and an additional male student was sponsored by Dr. Gail Agnant.

Students face financial, social and familial barriers in pursuing their education. One student is the eldest of his siblings and is expected to care for his younger siblings. The other students faced familial barriers, such as an unemployed father or the loss of income after a death in the family.

Many of the students do not live on-campus and face additional obstacles with transportation costs and long travel journeys each day. They spoke to the benefit of having the ability to be in close proximity of the classroom. They also spoke about barriers to nutrition, as school fees did not cover the cost of food.

Circle Care Center has since supported the students to get into University accommodation.

Epworth Poly Clinic

Dr. Chimbetete Training Programme



DR. CHIMBETETE TRAINING PROGRAMME

Dr. Chimbetete presented a nearly 3-hour informational training session to medical professionals (nurses, district medical officials, local medical staff and outreach personnel) about HIV patient management and care. He reviewed bedside manner, asking the correct questions related to health, social, physical, medical and personal competency, proper diagnosis of HIV and treatment options and procedures. He stressed the importance of getting to know a patient and understanding the signs of other issues that may not initially be apparent in order to prevent unintentional and irreversible misdiagnosis or mis-treatment.

While HIV confirmation testing is common in the United States, it is not practiced widely in other countries. Dr. Chimbetete urged medical professionals to re-test anyone whose HIV test delivers a positive result. Upon the same diagnosis of a second test, he then discussed the importance of outreach to other intimate partners whether they be a wife or husband or other sexual partners.

In order to treat people living with HIV, medical professionals must know the proper questions to ask in order to provide the proper and safe prescription medication regimen that will help to manage the disease and to prevent additional complications or even death. He encouraged participation from the attendees in order to avoid boredom and lack of enthusiasm of the information that was being presented. He also mentioned various real-life cases and asked attendees to present several of their own experiences from the field. He discussed offering HIV medications as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), and how those who might suffer physical abuse from a partner as a result of an HIV diagnosis or those who have an interest in PrEP might be able to take their meds without others knowing.

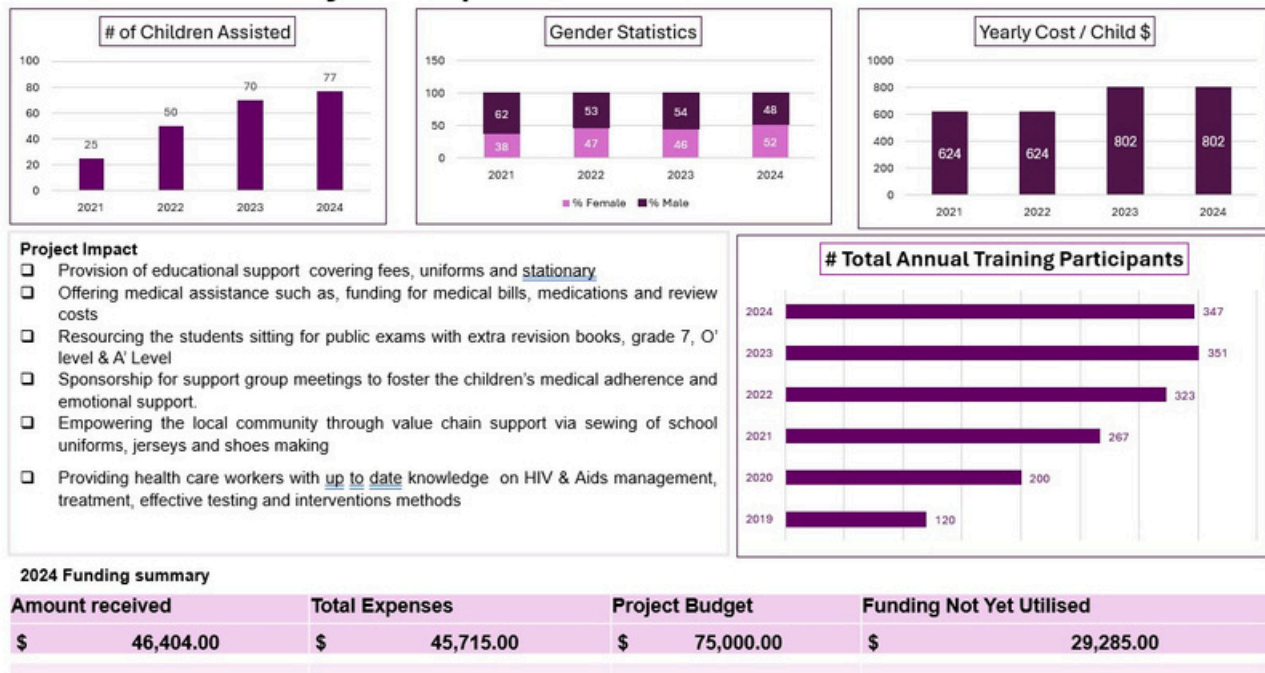
Dr. Chimbetete was a lively and engaging speaker who also commanded the room and attention from everyone. He injected light-hearted humor into some of his presentation while also bringing back a seriousness to the discussion when necessary to ensure that everyone understood the gravity of their work in their respective communities.

Epworth was about an hour's drive from Harare. The roads out to the clinic were in dire straits or non-existent. Emergency personnel would have a very difficult time reaching the area if necessary, and would take much longer reaching someone who needed their help. This was evidently a huge aspect to the importance of trainings such as these so that medical professionals located in these district clinics could help to diagnose and properly treat patients.



Conclusion

Project Updates



Graphic provided by Dr. Cleophas Chimbetete and Florence Chimbetete

CONCLUSION

Today, children, orphans, and people living with HIV in the Makumbe district located just outside of Harare are able to afford school supplies, books and uniforms, and are able to access healthcare. Professional trainings with life-saving information are reaching thousands of medical professionals in districts around the country to ensure competent HIV testing, treatment and prevention.

Several medical students attending the University of Zimbabwe are able to afford their annual tuition and school supplies, and will soon be able to afford on-campus accommodation and access to proper nutrition through on-campus meal plans.

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