

STORIES FROM THE FIELD: INCTR Tanzania

Dr Patricia Scanlan works as a Pediatric Oncologist for INCTR in Ocean Road Cancer Institute (ORCI) in Dar es Salaam, where the Tanzanian INCTR office is located. She regularly sends news about the children treated in ORCI pediatric ward.

Dr. Patricia Scanlan in ORCI Pediatric Ward, Dar es Salaam



Greetings from Ocean Road Hospital, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania where we have had a busy few months.

Children spend many months and in some cases up to a year living on the ward. Previously these children had no access to any form of education during their stay. In fact many of them have never been to school even at home.

Since the end of 2008 we have had a teachers' assistant come on a daily basis teaching very informal classes. He had two separate groups - the little ones for play school and the older ones later in the day for very elementary letters and numbers. The children love going to school when they are well enough. Since November of 2009 we have employed two full time teachers to take on formal education for the children. Leonard, our assistant remains to help with all that is happening. In this way children who come to our ward with a huge disadvantage (ie cancer) leave cured and with often their first exposure to education. We hoped this will help their future to be bright.

An eye cancer called retinoblastoma is our second most common diagnosis and has a terrible prognosis as they all come too late and therefore almost all of them die. We are designing a national awareness campaign to inform the public and medical profession of the key early sign for this disease – ie the white pupil. If the children come with this sign we could potentially save all of them. There is a lot of interest in the local private sector here to help get this message out there so we are hoping to have this project up and running soon. There are also some international organisations with whom we are planning to work closely in this regard – e.g. ORBIS. As a result of which we hope that children suffering from this terrible condition will come to us early enough to be cured. This is sadly almost never the case at the moment with only 10% of children surviving (compared to 95% in Europe where there is no delay in presentation).

And now to the children! I would like to introduce a few of our new wonderful little people to you.

The beautiful little girl called Gigwa. She has a kidney tumour called a Wilms tumour. In Europe 90-95% of children are cured who have this condition. In Tanzania in 2005 60% died. We are slowly improving this figure and we hope that little Gigwa will be here to prove our new treatments are working!

We managed to give most of her treatment at her local hospital with phone call support from Dar es Salaam. This helped us by freeing up bed space and helped the family by allowing her to stay at home (about 3000km from Dar) for large chunks of her treatment, which is now completed. She has returned – well and growing for her first followup.



This beautiful little boy is called Saddam Hassan. He has a condition called Acute Myeloid Leukaemia (AML). This is a form of leukaemia which is very very aggressive and although we have seen a number of children with this condition in the last 2 years we have been helpless to save any of them. The treatment used in Europe is just too strong and we don't have the support facilities to nurse the children through. However recently I have been in contact with some colleagues in India. They use a different and milder protocol and have had very encouraging results.

Little Saddam is the first patient ever to complete treatment in Tanzania for his disease Acute Myelocytic Leukaemia. He remained well during his 6 months treatment last year. He has stayed well for the first 6 months following this treatment. He now needs to be watched closely for at least one more year before we can start breathing easily but so far so good! If we cure him he will be the first Tanzanian child to survive with AML, so cross your fingers and Watch this space!

On behalf of all the children parents and staff at ORCI thank you so much for your continued interest and support.

*Much love from
Ward 3, Ocean Road Cancer Institute*