

ACU experts work with charity to save women and children in remote Tanzania

A remote Tanzanian hospital will receive their first modern anaesthetic and haematology analyser machine, thanks to a unique collaboration between Australian Catholic University (ACU) experts and charity organisation A Passionist Heart Foundation (APHF).

Itololo Hospital and Community Health Service (IHCHS), located 300km from Kilimanjaro International Airport, serves more than 7500 adults and children living in remote and disadvantaged villages in the Dodoma Region of Tanzania.

Administered by the Passionist Congregation, an international Catholic religious order, IHCHS is formally recognised as a private hospital by the Tanzanian government with plans to open a designated women and children's ward to help tackle the nation's high maternal mortality rates.

However, the cost of basic medical equipment means the hospital has been without a consistently workable anaesthetic machine and haematology analyser, instruments that are essential for safe pregnancies and performing emergency Caesarean sections.

Now a \$60,000 donation made possible through a collaboration between health and education experts at ACU and APHF which supports the work of the Passionists in developing nations, means the hospital could save more lives into the future.

The donation will give the hospital access to essential lifesaving machines that could reduce the high maternal mortality rate among women and children living in Itololo, and its surrounding communities in Tanzania.

According to the World Health Organisation, the Republic of Tanzania recorded 5400 maternal deaths in 2020, 400 times more than Australia and New Zealand's.

IHCHS reported more than 200 infant deaths in the Kondoa district in recent years. Most of these deaths were considered preventable, according to IHCHS administrator Fr Priscus Massawe CP, who helped establish the hospital's first maternity ward while he was parish priest of Itololo.

"There is a problem with the delay of women coming to the hospital, and when they do come, it is often too late," Fr Massawe said.

As the only high-level referral hospital in the Kondoa district, travelling to the hospital can be risky due to the dangerous road conditions, including possible rock falls and erosion of unsealed surfaces. These conditions, and the cost of transportation and health care, heavily influence whether pregnant mothers go to a hospital to give birth. If they do decide to go to hospital, most make the arduous journey on foot, on motorcycle, or make-shift ambulances.

Faced with increasing challenges to provide quality women's health care, ACU experts Professor Elspeth Froude, Adjunct Professor Sara Bayes, and Dr William Sultmann, who is also chair of APHF, were invited to Itololo to assess first-hand the needs of IHCHS.

The visit culminated in a report titled *Pamoja*, from the Swahili phrase '*Pamoja tunaweza*' meaning '*Together we can*'. The *Pamoja* report recommended APHF fund a Universal Anaesthetic Machine, an innovative technology designed to work without electricity, and a haematology analyser.

Dr Sultmann said the unique opportunity to visit IHCHC and engage directly with staff to understand their needs meant ACU and APHF could provide more effective, evidence-based support for child and maternal health and the wider health needs of the local community served by the hospital.

"The needs of Itololo are not unique, but they are critical, and they have been brought to our attention by members of our international Passionist community through the advocacy of Father Priscus CP, the hospital administrator," Dr Sultmann said.

"IHCHS is immensely grateful for the initial \$60,000 donation to improve their medical care of women at risk of a life-threatening pregnancy, but it is merely the beginning.

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“The hospital’s remote location means staff are working in isolation, with little connection to neighbouring clinics. Our hope is to increase their connectivity with the outside world, and improve their access to professional development, which is essential to improving the level of care they can provide.

“In responding to Itololo we understand we respond to so many other small clinics who access Itololo hospital as a key referral and support facility.”

Professor Froude, who is ACU’s National Head of School of Allied Health, said the next priority was to set up the hospital with an Internet subscription, as well as providing computers and video conferencing capability to enhance their communications when providing off-site health services, and to access digital professional development opportunities.

Enhancing the IT infrastructure of the hospital would also give staff the option to digitise all patient medical records for the first time.

“We saw one desktop computer that did have a dongle that Fr Priscus could use Wi-Fi for, but it's slow and they don't have Teams and Zoom set up,” Professor Froude said.

“Staff also go out remotely to visit pregnant women and give postnatal support quite a long way away, so having device they could take with them to connect back with the health service would be a great help.

APHF estimates the cost of this support equates to a further \$22,000 in donor funding.

For more information on the Itololo project, [visit A Passionist Heart Foundation’s website](#).

Dr Bill Sultmann, Professor Elspeth Froude, and Adjunct Professor Sara Bayes are available for interview. Fr Priscus Massawe CP can be contacted through Dr Sultmann.

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