

KP Physician Makes Kenyan Hospital Possible



Dr. Wagner (in the brown dress) at the hospital's grand opening. Watch a CNN video, featuring Drs. Wagner and Garzon.

By Elizabeth Schainbaum

When it comes to building support for a good cause, Gail Wagner, MD, turns to friends, colleagues, and family.

The KP Hayward oncologist has successfully established a network of support for providing health care to a poverty-stricken part of western Kenya. Several colleagues—and not just ones from the Hayward Medical Center—sit on the board of the Tiba Foundation she helped found.

KP also sends medical residents for a rotation with the Matibabu clinic, which is partially supported by the grant-making Tiba Foundation.

And when she wanted to build a hospital there, her mother made the 10-room facility possible.

“My mother told me I can’t ever ask her for money again,” she joked.

Dan Ogola, director of the Matibabu Foundation, told CNN that the hospital will create a myriad of opportunities. The nearest hospital is at least 16 kilometers away, a long distance considering most people travel by foot.

“Having this hospital here will mean a lot. It will be an opportunity for the community to access quality health services,” he said. “It will be an opportunity for some of the community members to be employed and, by extension, it will boost the economic development of this community.”

Hernando Garzon, MD, director of KP’s Global Health Program and a Tiba donor, said health and economics are intertwined.

“If people are out sick days and if children are not attending school because they are sick, then the chances

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of economic development and prosperity are less," said Dr. Garzon, in a CNN interview.

KP Hayward pediatrician and Tiba board member Amanda Schoenberg, MD, who has volunteered every September with the Matibabu clinic since 2004, said health care in that region has improved immensely.

"When we first had a clinic there we were inundated, seeing 80 to 100 kids a day, mainly children with urgent care needs," she said. "Now, it's more preventive. We are taking care of chronic needs and seeing many more well children because of the education we've helped provide."



The hospital initially will serve as a joint outpatient clinic and inpatient short-stay, 10-bed pediatric ward.

The new hospital, Dr. Schoenberg, said is crucial in fulfilling the community's needs and delivering "health care in the way it should be practiced."

In 2004, Dr. Wagner helped found the Matibabu Foundation in Kenya and the Tiba Foundation in the United States, which gives \$200,000 a year to the Matibabu clinic to provide medical care, training, and equipment.

Over the years, more than 100 KP employees and physicians have volunteered with the clinic. One KP Martinez physician, Eric Alexander, MD, of the Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Department, volunteered in

2010 and returned motivated to raise \$10,000 for wheelchairs. He raised the money and now Tiba is working on identifying people needing the wheelchairs.

The clinic is also one of the five locations offered through KP's Global Health Program, which allows medical residents to spend a rotation at a clinic overseas. The resident there now is Lisa Ryujin, MD, an Ob/Gyn resident who also had been there two years ago. In her March 19 blog entry, she noted the new hospital and the development of another clinic, saying "it was beautiful to see ... how wonderful things have been progressing."

Dr. Wagner, who is chairman of the Matibabu Foundation board and travels to Kenya at least once a year, recently attended the grand opening of the women and children's hospital.

"This hospital will keep all these little babies with malaria from dying because they can't get to another hospital," she told CNN recently.

The hospital initially will serve as a joint outpatient clinic and inpatient short-stay, 10-bed pediatric ward before being integrated into a larger medical campus that will develop over the years. It will be admitting patients soon.

"It was a relief to see the hospital built. It took over a year to get all the permits and environmental impact reports," Dr. Wagner said. "We will continue to provide good medical care, and we are raising money to build the next phase of the hospital."