

## **Harnessing the economy – the development of International Medical Group.**

The growth of International Medical Group, which includes International Hospital, International Medical Centres, IAA Healthcare, International Health Science University and International Medical Foundation has occurred during the period of stability and increased security which has been overseen by the current government.

For the full story of International Medical Group one must go back to Luweero in 1987, just after the end of the civil war between the Obote Two regime and the NRA. Dr Ian Clarke made a visit to this troubled part of Uganda and decided to relocate from his native Ireland, in order to carry out community health work. From small beginnings, where patients were treated under a tree or in the vestibule of the local church, the community health work quickly grew into a health-centre four and then to a full hospital (Kiwoko Hospital) and the Clarke family spent the next six years living and working among the people of Luweero.

Subsequently, in 1996 Dr Clarke relocated to Kampala, where he set up a private clinic. This was in response to the growing demand for private medical services from the Ugandan middle income group, which was beginning to emerge after a decade of peace. The number of patients coming to the clinic, known as International Medical centre, quickly grew hence Dr Clarke decided to develop a small hospital. A building in Old Kampala was renovated and became the first International hospital, officially launched in the year 2000. However this was not a purpose-built hospital and was barely adequate for the growing demand for medical care in Kampala.

One of the driving factors in the rapid growth of International Medical Group has been the method of payment which was established through IAA healthcare. IAA Healthcare offered companies and NGOs a means to pay for the healthcare for their staff at very reasonable fixed yearly rates. In these medical schemes over 80% of the service provision was through IMG's own hospital and growing number of clinics, thus all the funds paid by the companies were going back into the provision of the medical service and development of better facilities and not to a third party such as an insurance company.

Over a period of ten years IMG opened a number of clinics throughout Uganda - in Kampala, Jinja, Entebbe, Mbarara, Lira, Pader, Gulu and even in Juba South Sudan. The organization also set up clinics for private companies such as flower farms, factories and schools. With the growing number of patients, it became obvious that there was the need for a purpose-built hospital to facilitate modern medical equipment and state of the art medical care in Uganda. A four and a half acre green field site was located within Kampala at the foot of Tank Hill and work was commenced on the building of the new International Hospital Kampala. By 2008 the new purpose built hospital was fully functional, with 110 beds, a busy outpatient department, a well equipped theatre suite and an intensive care unit. International Hospital was the first hospital to carry out keyhole surgery in Uganda, plus open heart surgery and their outpatient base has grown to over 200,000 outpatient visits per year within Kampala alone.

As the facilities were developed and improved, IMG recognized the need for training health professionals to cope with the acute shortage of health workers and the developing human resources for health crisis in Africa. They responded to this need by setting up International Health Science University, the first private university in Uganda to specialize in the training of health professionals. The university is housed in the well equipped top floor of International Hospital building and not only includes a Nursing Faculty and Health Management and Policy Faculty, but the first distance learning Masters Degree programme in Public Health

in Uganda. Students on this course are able to access teaching materials through the internet and also to have interactive discussions with the tutors and lecturers, through an open source platform.

Recognizing the need to increase the level of expertise in the healthcare field in Uganda, IMG formed a collaboration with a centre of excellence in India and have sent more than twenty nurses for specialized training in the fields of intensive care, theatre management, coronary care, renal dialysis and hospital management. This collaboration will also result in the installation of the first cardiac catheterization unit in Uganda, as International Hospital develops MIMS International Cardiology Centre to be opened later this year.

IMG also realized that there are many poor people who cannot afford to access their services, so they set up an NGO - International Medical Foundation to reach out to the poor. One of the IMF projects within IHK itself is Hope Ward, for the treatment of complex conditions for the destitute. IHK pays 30% of the cost of treatment, while raising money from other sponsors within and outside Uganda through its sister foundation in the UK known as Suubi Trust. Other charitable and community programmes include treatment of those with HIV and TB in Namuwongo through 'Touch Namuwongo', HIV projects in Kasese, Mukono and Lira, a public private partnership to improve the services of the District Health Centre in Pader and a TB research project to make the diagnosis of TB through culture more rapid and affordable.

IHK has recently embarked on a programme to upgrade its facilities and equipment to those of a tertiary level referral hospital which will compete at regional level. To this end it has become a reference hospital for Toshiba, in partnership with a large South African equipment company known as TECMED. IHK will not only install a cardiac catheterization unit, as part of its cardiology centre, but is installing a 128 slice Cardiac CT. This is the most advanced CT scan in sub-Saharan Africa, even overtaking the Kenyan private hospitals. This scan can carry out CT angiograms, i.e. take a picture of the vessels of the heart, without the need for any tubes or needles. IMG is also in the process of forming a collaboration with some external universities, such that it can embark on a project to establish a full medical school for the region with the aim of having accreditation to international standards.

While there is still much to be done, there has been significant growth of International Medical Group over the past decade and a good foundation has been established for the group to become a regional referral centre and to ensure that Uganda competes with its neighbours in the health sector. International Medical Group contributes to the essential medical services of the country, but as a private player recognizing that sustainable development cannot be purely donor driven. IMG has not only focused on the top end of the market – on those who can pay, but has programmes reaching into the community to the base of the pyramid and also targets medical education and the building of capacity within the country. IMG employs over seven hundred people in its various enterprises and by the end of 2010 will be training seven hundred students at its university. Currently the vast majority of its resources and investment has been privately funded, but the group is looking forwards to increasing partnership with the government in the development of public private partnerships in this sector in order that quality medical services can be availed to all members of the community.

**Dr. Ian Clarke**, April 2010: <http://blog.suubitrust.org.uk/growth-of-img/>