

I don't think that I have ever felt as exhausted as I did on my flight home from Entebbe to Heathrow!

What a week I had just had. It had been my 3<sup>rd</sup> trip out to stay with Andrew and Sarah and my 3<sup>rd</sup> week working with the fabulous cleft team at CoRSU.

I had been invited out to continue my work supporting the staff who look after the infants and children with cleft lip and palate. Many of you will already know me (through the Interface Uganda website and FB posts) and my previous and ongoing work with the nutrition team and nursing staff at CoRSU. When I realised that Marc Swan (who you also know and who I work with day to day in Oxford) was also planning a trip to CoRSU to continue his teaching with the trainee surgeons, I thought it was the perfect opportunity to invite myself along on the same trip.....at least he'd have someone to talk to on the long flight, I thought to myself!

We arrived in Entebbe on the Saturday lunchtime, purposefully, to give us a chance to recuperate from the journey and acclimatise back into the Ugandan way of life before starting work. It didn't take long to settle in to the very comfortable 'Hodges Residence'.

We were awakened early on Sunday morning, to go for a fishing trip on Lake Victoria with Andrew and Sarah's neighbours, Jesse and Natalie. Despite Jesse's assurances that we'd return with enough fish to make dinner, we grew doubtful as the morning passed and our fishing lines became entwined with each other, caught on the floor of Lake Victoria and amongst the local fisherman's nets! Nevertheless, we should not have questioned Jesse's promises as sure enough we returned home, elated, with a trio of Nile Perch; one a piece. It was a hugely memorable start to a fantastic week.

Monday arrived and the proper work began.....dawn had only just broken as we were on the road to CoRSU with Andrew and Sarah.

I was warmly welcomed by the nutrition team with a celebratory cup of tea and biscuits in their newly acquired suite of offices and clinical rooms, which they certainly have every reason to be proud of. During this meeting I met the whole nutrition team: nutritionists, Bertha and Grace, paediatrician, Dr Anna, speech and language therapists, Duncan and Isaac, infant feed maker, Dora and nutrition nurse, Maureen. They also told me that they'd set up their special 'focus on breastfeeding week' to coincide with my visit.

The flat that the nutrition team have taken over is near the patient's hostel and kitchens. They now have separate rooms for administration, seeing and assessing patients, a breast-feeding room (with a cot, sofa, table and chairs), a kitchen and a bathroom. It feels light and airy and spacious and is perfect for being able to spend time doing clinical assessments and teaching new parents how to feed their babies. There's ample space for families to wait in turn to be seen; which is just as well, as over the week, I realised that this was often a never-ending queue!

One of the main reasons for my visit to CoRSU was to assess the success of the soft bottles and teats that I have been providing with the ongoing support of Interface Uganda. I needed to check that they were being used appropriately and safely. During the week, I taught the nutrition team (informally, individually and with formal presentations) how to conduct a full infant feeding assessment to ensure that the baby was suitable to be offered a soft bottle. All the teaching was well received and it was invaluable to have the opportunity to be able to offer this sort of specialist support. The various clinicians within the nutrition team at CoRSU have different levels of understanding of infant feeding which I was able to individually assess throughout the week. We conducted feeding assessments together on inpatients which were babies admitted on the nutrition programme, babies admitted for surgery and post-operative babies. There was also a regular stream of outpatients, ranging from neonates to older babies with complex medical needs and respiratory issues. During these feeding assessments, I was able to build on the current knowledge of the nutrition team and teach them how to manage specific situations in different patients. We worked together many times over the week, assessing patients and teaching parents how to feed their babies.

Another area of teaching that featured heavily over the week was teaching the nutrition team and the ward nurses about recognising respiratory distress in an infant. This was in conjunction with doing a feeding assessment and also with nursing infants post operatively after cleft surgery.

I used formal teaching by PowerPoint presentation which I repeated 3 times one morning to ensure that I caught as many staff as possible in between their usual work commitments on the very busy ward.

I also had the opportunity to bring the theory to life and teach management of the infant airway to the nursing staff on the ward whilst managing an inpatient

baby's airway who was having ongoing seizures and needed constant reassessment and appropriate adjustments in nursing and medical care. The following day, we were able to apply the same theory to a one year old with cerebral palsy and a cleft palate who came in for assessment with the speech and language therapists.

This collaborative working is perfect for teaching and learning from each other.

The nutrition team had also organised for me to do a talk for the mothers whose babies were born with a cleft. This talk was to focus on the importance of breastmilk feeding and teaching about clefts. It was quite a challenge to pitch the talk at the right level taking into consideration the language barrier. Nonetheless, Bertha and Grace translated into Luganda as we went along and the session went much better than I had envisaged it would when they asked me to do it!

The week proved invaluable for me to foster my relationships with the nutrition team and nursing staff, allowing me to assess and teach informally and formally. The familiarity and trust that is growing between us creates an open relationship where staff feel safe to ask questions about clinical situations. The team were always eager to learn with my teaching being well received. I continued to build my knowledge of how the cleft care pathway works at CoRSU, helping me to appreciate which aspects of my own knowledge and cleft nursing experience are realistic for the CoRSU team to adopt into their own cleft care pathways.

So, it's no wonder that the week whizzed by, each day being filled from waking to sleeping!

This trip would not have been possible and certainly not as worthwhile without the ongoing support that I receive from Interface Uganda and their fundraisers.....so thank you very much! It is a true privilege being able to work with the amazing cleft team at CoRSU. With our trusting relationships and my better understanding of their specific issues, I continue to offer advice, teaching and support remotely via email and WhatsApp to the nutrition team.

I'd also like to say an enormous thank you to Andrew and Sarah for being such welcoming hosts and happily sharing their home, food, sauna, sports club, gin.....the list goes on. It certainly was a week to remember. Hopefully I might be back again one day!