



women's health

A publication for those who support the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Women's Health

Road to Rwanda: U joins effort to boost country's capacity to train new doctors

Twenty years after genocide wiped out 800,000 of its people, Rwanda still struggles to rebuild its pool of medical professionals, many of whom perished or fled the country. Through a grant from the Human Resources for Health (HHR), **Rahel Ghebre, M.D., M.P.H.** is part of a team of doctors working to build the country's medical education infrastructure.



Dr. Rahel Ghebre in Rwanda



HHR is a partnership between the Government of Rwanda (Ministry of Health), the University of Rwanda Medical School, the Global Health Fund, Clinton Health Access Initiative and a number of academic medical centers in the United States.

"The model is to increase human resources in terms of medical physicians in a low-resource setting," said Ghebre. "Many medical schools have suffered from lack of trained educators, and political and economic instability. This program is building a strong foundation for the long-term stability of the medical school and, in particular, the area I am interested in: obstetrics and gynecology."

In Rwanda, 625 physicians treat 10 million people. As a point of reference, that's less than the number of faculty physicians at the University of Minnesota alone. There are 8,000 nurses, 91 percent of whom possess the lowest level of training, and just 10 dentists in the entire country. Physicians in subspecialties such as women's health are nearly non-existent. The Rwandan government has recognized the shortage of trained medical professionals as a critical health issue.

Assistant Director of Research Matt Gerber (pictured back right)



“They are not looking for handouts. They’re looking for partnerships.”

-Matt Gerber

Ghebre is helping to train residents at the University Central Hospital of Kigali (CHUK) the nation’s largest hospital, located in the capital, Kigali. Ghebre, her husband and two children moved to Kigali in August and will live there for one year.

Assistant Director of Research Matt Gerber, who is Ghebre’s liaison to the department while overseas, summed up the Rwandan spirit: “They’re not looking for handouts,” he said. “They’re looking for partnerships.”

Ghebre’s primary focus has been to design and teach a curriculum for pelvic surgery and gynecologic oncology to Rwandan residents. Prior to her arrival, she developed a curriculum for this subspecialty along with current UMN medical resident **Rebecca Peterson, M.D.**, and fellow **Tanya Pulver, M.D.** Both will be joining Ghebre in Rwanda this spring.

Different Demands

Since her arrival, Ghebre has encountered conditions just not seen with any frequency in the United States, such as eclampsia, brain malaria, maternal-fetal transmission of HIV, and advanced stages of cancer — especially cervical cancer, which is in part due to a lack of a cervical screening program. Patient education is a major obstacle: too often, patients don’t recognize warning signs or are afraid to seek care until it is too late.

“The Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of Rwanda has some amazing faculty who have built a program that was essentially non-existent post-genocide,” said Ghebre. “The program and faculty are young and the demand on their skill is great, but they have committed to training the best residents possible.”

Pregnancy-related complications are also a significant burden. According to Gerber, who visited Rwanda in the fall, there is a surprisingly high rate of Cesarean-section births, which frequently results in post-operative infection. Some basic equipment, such as a \$100 wound vac, are out of reach.

“There are some things happening that would be very preventable in the United States,” said Gerber. “But a lack of resources, staff and training make it difficult.”



Rwanda, continued

Snapshot of a modern Rwandan hospital

Though it's the country's most advanced hospital, the CHUK looks very different from a modern US facility.

"The things you notice first are the differences," explained Gerber.

Patients do not have private rooms. Instead, beds are lined up in large rooms and separated with curtains. IV bags are taped to the wall, and people with infections are commonly housed among the general patient population. There is no air conditioning, thus making protective surgical clothing very hot and cumbersome. Most of the lighting is natural light from windows, and Gerber saw some doctors using the light on their cell phones to check a patient's incision.

Patients are also responsible for their own meals and linens. Relatives bring food from home, and use coin-operated laundry facilities outside the hospital to launder the patient's clothing and bedding. There are no electronic records, and patients are responsible for storing and providing their own medical files. A side business has emerged: vendors with copy machines just outside the hospital where patients can make copies of their records.

Supplies on Ghebre's wish list, which Gerber brought with him on his visit, were simple: black writing pens, protective masks and visors, and hand sanitizer.

Fortunately, with English the national language, Ghebre does not have to deal with a language barrier. One of her biggest obstacles, however, is translation of a different sort: applying what she is able to accomplish for patient care at the University of Minnesota to Rwanda.

"As I am teaching, I am also learning to adapt to the context of this region. The Rwandan faculty have been kind and patient enough to show me the way," expressed Ghebre. "Although I do miss my fancy equipment and diagnostic tests, I am able to accomplish more than I expected with the limited resources."

A country with a commitment

There is little doubt that the Rwandan government is committed to the health of its people, as evidenced by several broad-scale health initiatives. The country has committed to a school-based HPV vaccine program, which will in the long term reduce cervical cancer burden. Life expectancy is on the rise, deaths of children under age five have been cut in half, and malaria deaths have dropped by nearly two-thirds. Most people attribute this to Mutuelle de Sante', the country's universal health insurance, which has made doctor visits and hospital stays affordable.

According to Ghebre, a great deal of effort has been invested in reducing maternal mortality with significant success. Rwanda is set to meet the United Nations Millennium Goal for reducing maternal mortality by three quarters by 2015. Efforts are ongoing to increase access to screening for cervical and breast cancer.



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Rwanda, continued

“Rwanda is at an amazing time in its national history,” said Ghebre. “The people are optimistic about the future and truly believe they can build a great modern nation. I think people who visit would find hardworking people who are ready to move forward from their past. Every day I’m amazed by the development both at work and outside of work. I think the only way to understand it is to experience it.”

Future connections

In addition to her medical education role, Ghebre has found ways to collaborate on several research projects in the hope of building a bridge between the University of Minnesota and the University of Rwanda. Additional University of Minnesota Nurse-Midwifery faculty members **Kris McCullough, C.N.M.** and **Deb Reinisch, C.N.M.** are set to visit Ghebre this winter. After her year in Rwanda, Ghebre plans to continue to be involved in global health, particularly in the area of cancer research and surgery.

Perhaps above all else, Ghebre’s experiences in Rwanda have made her more committed than ever to her role as teacher.



“My experience in Rwanda has made me reflect on the work we do at the University of Minnesota,” explained Ghebre. “As is often the case, you have to leave home to appreciate it. The University of Minnesota is an amazing place to teach and work. The contribution the schools of health science give in terms of training nurses, pharmacists, dentists and physicians is integral to the health of the state. Our efforts in education cannot be any less than what we give to being the best in clinical care and research.”

Stay up-to-date on Dr. Ghebre’s work in Rwanda! Check out her blog on our Road to Rwanda web site at <http://www.obgyn.umn.edu/news-events/road-to-rwanda/index.htm>

“The people are optimistic about the future and truly believe they can build a great modern nation.”

~Dr. Ghebre

Midwives for Haiti

Ann Forster Page, C.N.M., (on right in photo) traveled to Haiti for a “working spring break” with Midwives for Haiti. While there, she was involved in teaching, precepting, and caring for patients in mobile and rural clinics as well as in labor and delivery at the local hospital. Forster Page reports that the organization trains 20 skilled birth attendants each year. Women are greatly underserved in Haiti, with approximately 1 in 28 dying in childbirth.



University offers peace of mind in the face of tragedy

It's the kind of story that takes your breath away. A healthy mother of two experiences abdominal discomfort one day, and learns she has a rare, aggressive and incurable form of cancer. This was the case with Carmen Shoberg, who sadly passed away on February 13, 2014 at the age of 48, just 10 weeks after University of Minnesota physicians found the disease throughout her abdomen.

"It's very hard to understand why this would happen to someone who gave so much, who had so much to live for," expressed her father, Chuck Gooder. "We've gone through all the feelings: disbelief, anger, questioning. We're still going through it."

Gooder, who spent more than 30 years as an Administrative Director at the University of Minnesota, including pediatrics, internal medicine and women's health, said his daughter took comfort in knowing she was getting the best care possible.

The University of Minnesota is often the first place people think of when faced with a serious health issue. They know physicians are up-to-date on the very latest treatments and scientific research. That's why Carmen, a long-time University employee herself, never considered being treated anywhere else.

"She knew the faculty and the quality of the institution," said Gooder. "She was very comfortable in her mind with the care she was getting, and that helped a lot."

Even when the outcome is not a happy one, it's important for patients and family members to feel that no stone was left unturned. Additionally, from tragedy can sometimes come a glimmer of hope: University of Minnesota doctors use each experience to inform future treatments so that others may be saved.

Carmen's first course of treatment was to undergo major surgery to remove the cancer, followed by chemotherapy. When tumors continued to grow, doctors performed more tests and discovered Carmen had endometrial adeno-cell carcinoma, a highly undifferentiated, hard-to-identify cancer. Only 24 cases had been reported in medical literature, with no regimen of treatment.

Key through this ordeal, said Gooder, was seamless communication with the faculty. Even while he travelled, the physicians caring for Carmen kept him up-to-date and connected to her care.

"It was one of the single-most important aspects of her care from her point of view, and from ours as her family," emphasized Gooder.

Also crucial, said Gooder, was the excellent continuum of care his daughter received – from the faculty, fellows, residents, gyn/onc nurses, cancer center station nurses and sub-specialist consults, to the stellar home hospice care. At all stages of the continuum, the family felt that every medical challenge or new development (elevated labs, additional diagnostic test, changes in physician-directed care) was being communicated and addressed.

Carmen left behind a husband of 25 years and two daughters. Her extended family all reside in the Twin Cities area: her parents Chuck and Sharleen (a former, long-time nurse at Boynton Health Services at the University), three brothers, and many nieces and nephews.

Carmen was "the hub of the family," and they continue to get together regularly to honor her memory.



What's new?

New faculty and staff



Dr. Boris Winterhoff joined the Gynecologic Oncology Division in October 2014. Dr. Winterhoff completed his medical degree and doctorate in tumor biology from the Christian Albrechts University of Kiel in Germany. He completed his Obstetrics & Gynecology residency program at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester in 2010, followed by a Translational Research Fellowship at UCLA-Santa Monica in partnership with the Mayo Clinic. He

finished his fellowship in Gynecologic Oncology at the Mayo Clinic in June 2014. His research interests primarily focus on cancer genomics and individualized medicine.



Anne Coetzee joined Women's Health Specialists as Director of Clinical Operations & CSU Programs in June 2014. Anne brings more than 20 years of experience in clinic and hospital operations,

physician practice management, and quality and process improvement to the job.

Lab tour raises money for cancer research

In July, one lucky bidder at the Minnesota Ovarian Cancer Alliance (MOCA) Mid-Summer Night's Gala won a VIP Lab Tour Experience with the University of Minnesota Gynecology/Oncology department. The tour gave the bidder and five guests a behind-the-scenes look into the latest advances in ovarian cancer research and treatment, with presentations by **Martina Bazzaro, Ph.D.**, **Melissa Geller, M.D., M.S.**, **Amy Skibitz, Ph.D.** and **Timothy Starr, Ph.D.** Adrian de los Rios (formerly of Travail restaurant) donated catering for the tour.

One hundred percent of the winning bid of \$2,000 went to MOCA, which is committed to supporting UMN ovarian cancer research. For more information about MOCA's work in supporting women with ovarian cancer, advancing research and raising awareness, visit mnovarian.org.



Mid-Summer Night's Gala

2014 MOCA Silent Auction

VIP Lab Tour Experience



A network of excellence

Reproductive Medicine Center has been accepted into Aetna's Institutes of Excellence™ Infertility Network. Clinics in the Network have met extensive quality criteria and have been selected by Aetna. Aetna Institutes™ facilities are publicly recognized, high-quality, high-value health care facilities with distinguished performance.

Expansion of Dr. Drake's project for mature women

The project Mindfulness and Wellbeing: The Mature Woman, which is part of the National Nexus Innovations Incubators Program, is being expanded to include a module on cardiovascular health.

Dr. Diana Drake applied for the System Wide Engagement Program Grant for continued support and expansion of the project.

Honors and Awards

Congratulations to our “Top Doctors”

The *Mpls./St. Paul Magazine* Top Doctors 2014 issue featured some of our physicians, chosen by their peers as doctors they would go to themselves or refer their family to.

Gynecologic Oncology

Peter A. Argenta, M.D.
Linda F. Carson, M.D., F.A.C.O.G.
Melissa A. Geller, M.D.

Obstetrics and Gynecology

Carrie Ann Terrell, M.D.

Maternal Fetal Medicine

Daniel V. Landers, M.D., F.A.C.O.G.
Tracy L. Prosen, M.D.
Kirk D. Ramin, M.D.

Reproductive Endocrinology

Mark A. Damario, M.D., F.A.C.O.G.
William R. Phipps, M.D.

The *Minnesota Monthly Magazine* “Best Doctors 2014” September issue featured these physicians, chosen by their peers as best in their field.

Gynecologic Oncology

Peter A. Argenta, M.D.
Linda F. Carson, M.D., F.A.C.O.G.
Levi Downs, M.D.
Melissa A. Geller, M.D.
Rahel Ghebre, M.D.
Sally Mullany, M.D.

Obstetrics and Gynecology

Mary Mahoney, M.D.
Mary Pukite, M.D.
Carrie Ann Terrell, M.D.

Reproductive Endocrinology

Mark A. Damario, M.D., F.A.C.O.G.
William R. Phipps, M.D.

Enhancing Scholarship Through Mentoring Teams: The S.M.A.R.T.® Program

Dr. Andrea Shields, associate professor, was awarded a Faculty Career Mentoring Pilot Grant. The S.M.A.R.T.® Program, Scholars and Mentors Achieving Research Together, is a new comprehensive research curriculum for junior faculty that was awarded a \$10,000 mentoring grant from the University of Minnesota Medical School. This year-long pilot program was launched October 2014 in the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Women’s Health with the goal of increasing research productivity and scholarly activity through mentoring teams. S.M.A.R.T.® teams are being led by Dr. Daniel Landers from the Division of Maternal Fetal Medicine, Dr. Melissa Geller and Dr. Timothy Starr from the Division of Gynecology Oncology, and Dr. Ruby Nguyen from the Department of Epidemiology. Each of these mentors has committed their time and research experience, passion and the organizational skills to advocate and mentor scholars through a structured research curriculum. Currently there are 9 junior faculty participating in the pilot program.

In keeping with the Medical School’s commitment to research and innovation, the goals of the S.M.A.R.T.® Program include increasing inter- and intra-departmental collaboration, mentor-mentee accountability and scholarship within the department. Research results obtained through the program will be presented at the Medical School Mentoring Symposium at the end of the fiscal year. If successful, the program will be integrated into the department’s current faculty development plan.

It’s a girl! Women’s Health doctors help deliver a baby orangutan

On January 7, doctors from Maternal Fetal Medicine department teamed up with veterinarians from the Veterinary Medical Center (VMC) to assist in the birth of a primate. This was the second occasion in which doctors from Women’s Health helped with a C-section delivery at the VMC. The team of obstetricians delivered a healthy female infant, born to a 27 year-old Sumatran Orangutan named Markisa from the Como Zoo.



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On My Mind

Dear friends,

It's always been part of our vision to provide faculty, fellows and residents with global medicine opportunities. Today, we have the pleasure of supporting **Rahel Ghebre, M.D., M.P.H.** in a promising new partnership between the University of Minnesota and the University of Rwanda Medical School in the country's capital, Kigali.

In August, Dr. Ghebre moved to Kigali, where she'll spend a year helping train Rwanda's next generation of doctors.

The story in this issue describes her work and gives a glimpse into what healthcare is like inside a modern Rwandan hospital.

Rwanda is committed to strengthening its healthcare system, and we're so pleased to be a part of that progress now and in the future. Dr. Ghebre has already identified opportunities to collaborate on research projects with the University of Rwanda. This spring, she'll welcome **Tanya Pulver, M.D.** and resident **Rebecca Petersen, M.D.** to work with her. It is our hope that others will take the opportunity to visit and join their efforts.

Here at home, we're as committed as ever to research in gynecologic cancer. Our world-class faculty is working relentlessly on studies

that will one day lead to personalized cancer treatments, identifying genetic risk factors, and early detection through tumor biomarkers.

We are always saddened when cancer overtakes the ability of modern science to stop it, as it did in the case of Carmen Shoberg, the daughter of Chuck Gooder, a former administrative director and friend of the department. This tragic loss, and the struggles of many patients, are reminders of how important it is to continue to increase our understanding of how we diagnose and treat cancer.

In 2015, we will remain true to our mission: advancing research, improving medical education globally and in Minnesota, and setting the standard of care for women. I couldn't be more proud of the passion and talent I see in our department every day, and look forward to the work ahead.

Linda Carson, M.D.

Professor and Chair, Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Women's Health

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