



Malawi Esophageal Cancer Palliative Care Program

For 6 months Mary B. has been progressively unable to swallow food. Last week she was admitted to the hospital; she could not swallow liquids - not even her own saliva. Prior to this week, Mary, like hundreds of previous Malawians with inoperable esophageal cancer, would have been sent home to die; her family would have watched in horror as she slowly starved to death. Today, however, Mary can eat and drink.

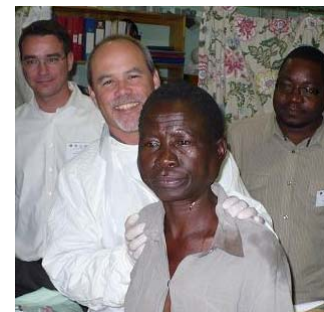


Surgeons OverSeas (SOS), the flagship program of the **Society of International Humanitarian Surgeons (SIHS)**, along with the **Lions Club of Blantyre** and the **Malawi Press Trust**, sponsored an exciting and innovative strategy to assist patients with inoperable esophageal cancer throughout the entire southern African country of Malawi.

In Malawi, esophageal cancer is the 3rd most common cancer, but few patients receive treatment. Most patients come to the hospital too late to be cured, however, a small metallic mesh tube (stent) can be placed into the esophagus and used to push the tumor to the side, opening the blockage and allowing patients to eat. This procedure is not a cure, but patients get significant relief and often live comfortably for an additional 6-12 months - a much better alternative to dying horribly in a matter of weeks.



To assist patients with incurable esophageal cancer a three part program including **surgeon training, nurse education, and research** was developed. The program first consisted of workshops held in the Malawian cities of Blantyre and Lilongwe. Surgeons learned to place stents and nurses learned about caring for patients with esophageal stents and how to educate the patients' family. A total of 18 local surgeons and 46 nurses from 15 hospitals received training.



The surgeon workshops were taught by Dr. Russell White, Chief of Surgery and Endoscopy, Tenwek Mission Hospital in Kenya. Dr. White is a recognized world expert in the insertion of these stents – having assisted over 1,300 patients with this procedure.

The final part of the project is research. Clinical data, including risk factors, symptoms, tumor size, and follow-up, along with biopsy specimens are being collected. These data will assist in providing a clearer picture of the problem and suggest solutions for prevention. Additionally, the data will be useful in advocating for additional resources to care of patients with esophageal cancer.

More information on the project can be found in a Malawi Daily Times newspaper article at: www.dailytimes.bppmw.com/article.asp?ArticleID=13582

The **Society of International Humanitarian Surgeons (SIHS)** is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization based in New York, USA whose mission is to save lives in developing countries by improving surgical care through collaborative training, funding, and research initiatives. The SIHS flagship program is **Surgeons OverSeas (SOS)**.

For more information or to donate:

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