

Hospital with 30 cleaners but no doctors

You would not want to be ill in Yei. The local hospital is, quite simply, shocking. It has a look of dereliction not softened by the number of people in its dusty grounds. They stand, they sit, they wait. Some are washing dishes under the shade of a tree, others cook over open fires.

Yet there is no hustle and bustle. The noise of the crickets is punctuated by the gentle sweep of a grass brush as a man of indeterminate age moves leaves and dust from a pile here to a pile there.

This is a hospital with absolutely no doctors, few trained nurses, and limited medical supplies. Its failure as a hospital was brought home strongly to us when we learned that Bishop Hilary's nephew Francis had been taken there following a motorbike accident. He lay for three days before the family paid the one doctor in town (he set up privately after he was not paid by the authorities who run the hospital) to do an X-ray. This revealed his spine was broken in four places. With no treatment available in Yei, Francis endured the six hour road journey in the Bishop's jeep to Juba. Tragically he died soon after. He was in his twenties.



I visited Yei Hospital with CMSI associate Poppy Spens, who introduced me to Simon Loro Swaka, County Medical Officer (left with Poppy and Mary, a cleaner). Poppy tells him that the Martha Clinic has done an assessment of malnutrition among children in the villages, she has a list of names of children too malnourished for vaccination. The previous day (January 20) Martha's mobile clinic went to a rural village and treated 87 patients and 13 ante-natals.

She also tells Simon about the clinic's plans for a new eye clinic. "That is good," Simon responds with sincerity. "You are very good because what you talk of happens."

There are only 88 practicing doctors and 10 fully qualified midwives in the whole of Southern Sudan, a country of 10 million, Poppy tells me. The region has the highest maternal mortality rate in the world.

We briefly call into the dark children's ward (the outer section of the children's ward is pictured right) where the beds are covered in mis-matched sheets and blankets and the paint peels from the walls. There are several women and children, but only one nurse to be seen.



Families must be close at hand when a patient is in Yei Hospital, as no food is provided.



We pass an operating theatre (left) which looks alarmingly like a shed. But as there are no surgeons in Yei there are probably no operations. The trolley sits outside, two dirty blankets on top, a cat cleaning itself below. In the maternity ward there are three mothers with new babies. One baby has an extra little finger on each hand, which

will apparently fall off soon. Nothing to be alarmed about, Alice Sama, the nurse midwife tells me. Alice is heavily pregnant with her fourth child. She explains that there is no-one qualified to do a caesarean section if a woman is in obstructive labour. (Right - mum and baby).

Leaving the maternity ward, it is hardly surprising the majority of women chose to have their babies at home. As we leave the hospital we meet Clinical Officer Onesimos Mono. He tells us he has not been paid for five months. We are joined by Margaret, one of the hospital's 30 cleaners. It is ironic really, a hospital with 30 cleaners but no doctors.



During the Civil War Yei Hospital was run by the charity Norwegian People's Aid, but Poppy says the standards have dropped since NPA left. Bishop Hilary is anxious that the NPA be asked to once again take over running the hospital from the Eastern Equatorial State, but the State has said no. The Bishop said Juba Hospital does have doctors because it is funded by the Government of Southern Sudan. In the wake of Francis's accident the Bishop vowed to put pressure on the County Commissioner to ensure that Yei Hospital is staffed by paid doctors.