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## Learning the lessons

There is a vibrant discussion taking place at the moment about how African scientists and researchers can be encouraged to increase and improve their outputs. I completely back the argument. But often frontline health workers (physicians, nurses, paramedicals) are also brought into the equation with criticism that they also are not doing enough research. At the risk of upsetting a few, I find myself repeatedly re-hearing the comments of a leading academic at a medical education conference in Harare earlier in the year. 'I'm not sure doctors should do research', he said, 'they should concentrate on teaching'.

The academic in question was Kevin Marsh, Senior Advisor to the Nairobi-based African Academy of Science when addressing the MEPI (Medical Education Partnership Initiative) conference. And he has a point. Pushing back the barriers of knowledge is vitally important, but can be a little self-indulgent when set against the huge responsibility of nurturing the next generation of doctors or nurses or anaesthetists coming through the ranks.

Could it be that the 'teaching lobby' needs to get itself organised! It is losing out on the chatlines of international health to the very well-meaning and well-intentioned research lobby, which is trying to see how Africa's voice and Africa's ailments (from non-communicable diseases to neglected diseases) can gain a greater platform and voice in the international arena.

Everyone in medical practice needs to remember that they were once students of their trade. There will be favourite teachers, and despised ones too... but the overwhelming memory will be for those who made a positive impression or impact on the up-and-coming rookie.

Do enough senior professionals give

enough back to the new generation now? I don't know and maybe it is an area that needs a little bit more light shedding on. The research agenda explores all angles, maybe time the teaching agenda caught up a bit of lost time?

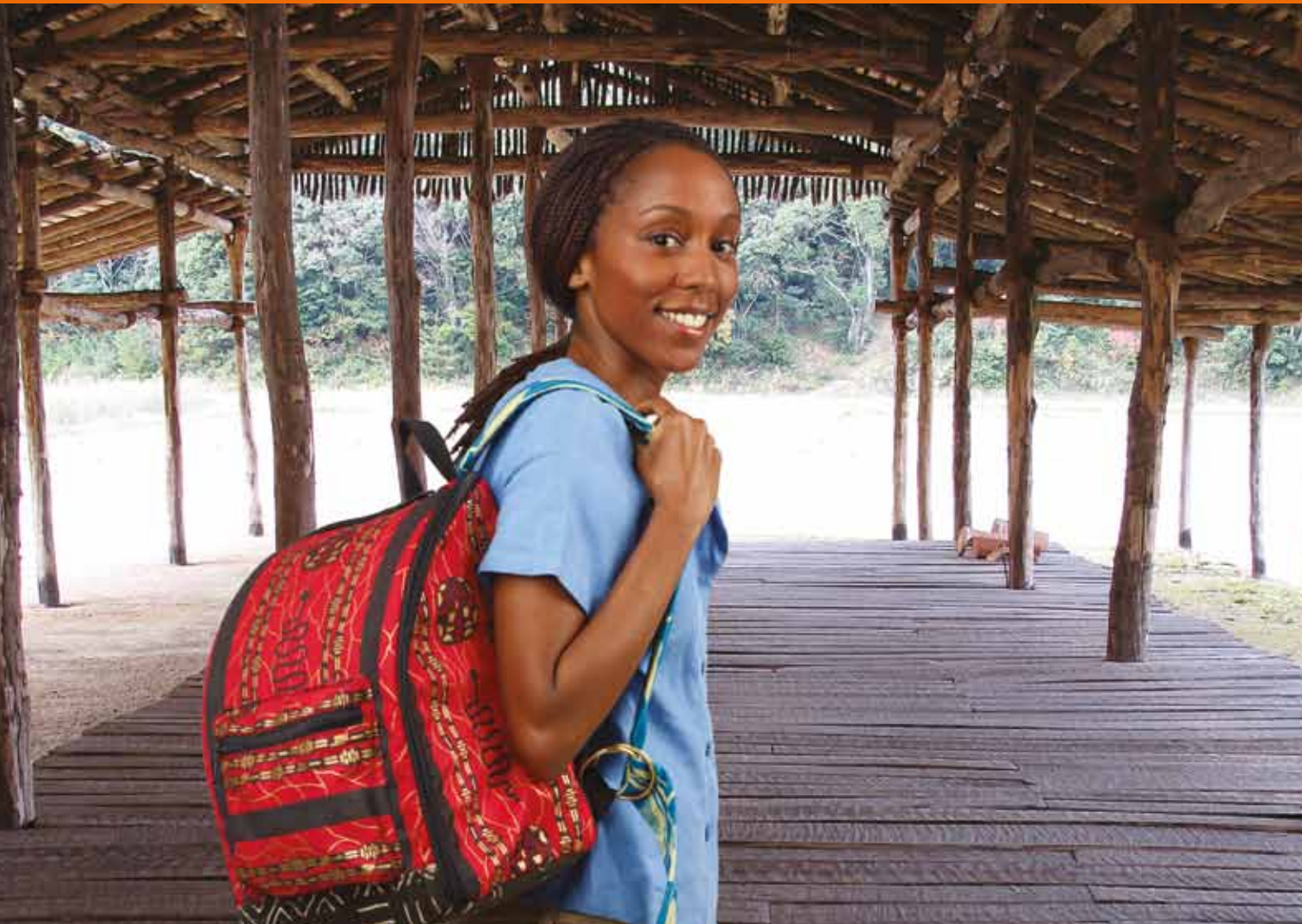
As I write, Sierra Leone has been declared free of Ebola. It has been a long slog, and one that has not been without its financial controversies involving both the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Defence in Freetown, but celebrations all round. This is a huge moment after a very difficult couple of years, which has seen a huge loss of life from Ebola (not least among the health professions who recorded 221 losses), but an even greater loss from malaria, measles and diarrhoeal diseases as the health system collapsed under the pressure of the communicable and frightening Ebola Virus. There is a huge regeneration and restructuring programme that now needs to be put in place to regain the lost ground against these historic curses. Fingers crossed that sometime in December, Guinea will also get the all clear (they are counting down the days now since their last case), and Ebola in West Africa will be consigned to history, or at least this deadly outbreak.



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