

Supporting paediatric surgery in South Sudan

Emma Lourie describes how Scottish surgical colleges have joined forces in a charitable endeavour

Two of Scotland's most historic and prestigious surgical institutions are collaborating to support the work of leading global healthcare charity Kids Operating Room (KidsOR). The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow have come together to raise funds to support a first-ever paediatric surgeon in South Sudan.

The Colleges, which boast a combined membership of more than 45,000 from all around the world, have joined forces to raise funding for KidsOR's scholarship programme in South Sudan, which aims to support the scholarship and training of the country's first paediatric surgeon and for a period of at least five years. Each college will be looking to raise £6,500, given that £13,000 supports a trainee surgeon through one year of training.

Michael Stitt, Director of Partnerships at The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, said: "The Global Surgery Foundation exists in order to help to build sustainable surgical capacity in communities suffering from a chronic shortage of care. It provides vital services to children who might not have otherwise had access to the healthcare they need."

Alison Lannigan, Chair at HOPE Foundation, said: "The fellows and members of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow and those of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh have contributed successfully for many years to the training and education of surgeons both in the UK and overseas. We are delighted to have the opportunity through Kids OR to take this further and collaborate in the funding of the Paediatric Surgical Scholarship Programme in South Sudan. At RCPSCG, our members recognise the need to improve surgical care on a global scale and are delighted to award funding from the Hope Foundation to this worthy endeavour."

Prof George Youngson, CBE trustee of Kids OR said: "Developing surgical services for children in a difficult part of the world, needs careful planning, commitment and resources particularly at a time when health services in our own country are being greatly stretched. The two surgical colleges in Scotland have come together and looked beyond our own immediate challenges and taken an initiative that will provide treatment for a huge number of children in need of care elsewhere in the world."

While the pandemic has a global perspective, so does the lack of access to surgical treatment for children in parts of the world like South Sudan where external aid is hard to penetrate. This makes the investment in

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assisting and developing local solutions provided by local surgeons and carers all the more precious.

David Cunningham, CEO of KidsOR, said: "We would like to thank the Royal Colleges for supporting our work in South Sudan. Despite being a country of 11 million – over half of whom are children – South Sudan lacks a single paediatric surgeon. The country also lacks the infrastructure with no paediatric Operating Room. This is reflected in the fact the country has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world (58.6 per 1,000 live births) and an alarmingly high under-fives mortality rate (89.8/1,000)."

Since 2018, the KidsOR Scholarship Program has worked with a number of partners to both fund the scholarships programme and to develop the infrastructure and networks needed to train paediatric surgeons across Africa. The first of the 120 KidsOR surgical scholars are just now beginning to graduate.

One such graduate surgeon is Dr Alicia Messenga, who is based at Bugando Medical Centre, in Mwanza, Tanzania – a hospital that provides services to a population of almost 17 million (one third of the total population of the country). She said: "Successful completion of my studies has benefitted our community as paediatric patients get the specialist care they need. As Bugando Medical Centre is also a university teaching hospital, surgical students get exposure to paediatric surgery now that we have a paediatric surgery unit in the hospital thanks to KidsOR and Smile Train."

Later this year, KidsOR will begin training South Sudan's first paediatric surgeons. The two scholars are Dr Betty Arkangalo Yuggu Phillimona and Dr Bidali James Sebit Nzira. The Royal Colleges' funding will be supporting the training of Dr Betty Arkangalo Yuggu Phillimona.

KidsOR is a charity tackling the global crisis in children's surgery. You can donate to their lifesaving work by visiting www.kidsor.org.