

COVID-19 in Zambia: a trainee's perspective

For East, Central and Southern Africa College of Physicians (ECSACOP) trainee, **Dr Naluca Mwendaweli**, COVID-19 has had a huge impact on her day-to-day training and working. In this edition of RCP Global's ECSACOP update, we find out what it's like at the forefront of healthcare in Zambia.

What was a typical day like before COVID-19?

From Monday to Friday, starting at 8am, I would participate in daily ward rounds. One day was set aside for reviewing patients in the outpatient specialist clinics. I had at least one day in a week to do my call in the emergency unit, as well as at least two weekend calls in a month. Twice a week we had morning academic presentations and midday bedside tutorials.

When did things begin to change?

Not much change was noticed at the time the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a public health emergency of international concern – it was almost 'business as usual'.

However, things changed when Zambia recorded its first two cases of confirmed COVID-19 on 18 March. Outpatient specialist clinics in my department were stopped. We had to decongest the wards and most patients who were considered stable were discharged.

How has COVID-19 impacted your training?

My training came to a standstill for a few weeks, with no academic activities. Everyone was focused on patient care. Interaction with consultants reduced. Bedside tutorials stopped and only the nephrology unit continued having its bedside teaching round at least once a week. Tutorials and lectures in neurology are held on the Zoom platform every day for all postgraduate students. Currently, only nephrology and neurology are having academic activities on Zoom.

My facility is a non-COVID Centre. However, we have a schedule for us to do rounds at the COVID centers. I have not been there yet due to my asthma. Patients that present to my facility with respiratory symptoms are put in an isolation ward until their results are available. Those that test positive are immediately transferred to the COVID centre, while those that are negative are sent back to the ordinary inpatient wards. However, results take about 5–7 days, so the risk of contact with COVID patients that do not have respiratory symptoms is high.



How are you now treating patients?

We now treat every patient as if they may have COVID-19. I make sure that both the patient and I wear a mask, and I also wear a face shield during procedures. I wear gloves when touching a patient, and make sure I sanitise my hands after seeing each patient, and when I take off my gloves. Although life may have changed, we are doing everything we can to keep ourselves and our patients safe. ■

RCP COVID-19 Appeal

by Timothy Gillow FRCP

I'm delighted to support the RCP COVID-19 Appeal.

We live in extraordinary times. With my perspective as a physician in the final years of my professional career, I see the past and future months of COVID-19 as the greatest single challenge in my decades of working in the NHS. Participating in the RCP COVID-19 Appeal is a great way to help our College help us all.

The current crisis has brought back memories of being newly qualified at University College Hospital. It was my first house job. UCH and the Middlesex Hospital had a good share of the early work in AIDS. I worked on the respiratory ward with pneumocystis pneumonia as a key challenge. Life prognosis was extremely poor before combination antiviral therapy totally transformed HIV medicine.

Today, COVID-19 presents a greater logistical challenge while sharing the problem of limited and inadequate treatment. I am full of admiration for the way medical students, newly qualified doctors and other health workers have stepped up to the challenge both with enthusiasm and the necessary spice of idealism. We owe much to this new generation and it is good to do whatever we can. Helping the training of young – and not so young – doctors is central for the RCP, and the COVID-19 Appeal supports the education of this new generation.

I am pleased that the COVID-19 Appeal also focuses on preparedness and research rather than just immediate response. Vitality, we must learn from this pandemic in a way we didn't from previous virus disease outbreaks. You can find out more about the COVID-19 Appeal in the document included with this

magazine. The RCP wishes to thank the patrons of the Appeal for their generosity and support:

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