

## ***A Letter from Claire Smithson – April 2020 – Mission Partner, Maua Methodist Hospital, Kenya.***

***Dr Claire Smithson is a Mission Partner based at Maua Hospital in Kenya. Maua Methodist Hospital received support from the World Mission Fund in March 2020 to purchase Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in preparation for COVID-19 cases.***

### ***She writes:***

Let me again say “Thank you” on behalf of Maua Methodist Hospital (MMH) for the swift response to our request for donations for PPE. *(It has been used, along with other donations, to purchase things like gloves, masks, gowns, sanitizer and materials for administering oxygen)*

Just to update you a little on what is happening in Maua. So far we have not had a confirmed case of Covid, but a couple of suspected cases. The last was a 23yr old man, seen on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> April, who as it turns out has confirmed TB and a negative Covid test. However it has told us that despite all the time to prepare, Meru County is not ready at all to handle cases. Maua Methodist Hospital (MMH) cannot test for Covid, so having alerted the local Government authorities it took them 24 hours to come and test the patient. In the meantime we tried to transfer him to another unit as we were not sure if he would need ventilation – his oxygen levels were dropping dangerously low despite being on an oxygen mask. Meru Referral Hospital (supposedly set up with an ICU) said they had no PPE and no facilities to take the patient. Other hospitals also refused, and Nairobi also refused unless he had a positive test. SO, we have kept him in isolation and done our best until today, 5 days later, we received his negative test. Fortunately he is recovering with his TB treatment. However this



experience scares us as we realise if we take a patient we are basically “stuck” with them and we just do not have the facilities to care for the really sick (no ventilators or airway pressure machine (CPAP)), can only give support and oxygen. We have had very little support from the government, 3 Hazmat suits, a pair of gloves and not much else. Being the supervisor of our Pharmacy and Medical supplies and trying to procure what we need to protect our staff has been/is certainly a huge challenge.

Barbara has been busy sewing cloth masks, so at least each of our staff now has 2 cloth masks, one to wash and one to wear. Only those screening patients are wearing surgical masks, which increased in price 6-fold over night. N95 masks are preserved for those caring for cases or suspected cases – at £12 per mask we

can't afford to use them elsewhere and are still trying to work out if there is a way to reuse them.



The public have been instructed to wear mask in all public places. At the weekend I was in Meru & around 30% of people out and about had masks on, but I would guess less than 5% were wearing them correctly – below the nose, under the chin and on the forehead being the favourite places to store them. When approaching a police check all masks are worn correctly, so people know but are just not doing it. Social distancing in town is almost non-existent. Again, people know but are just not doing it. We have night-time curfew and restriction of moving between “hotspot” counties like Nairobi and Mombasa, and the police have really beaten people up for disobeying. One story was of people travelling from Nairobi to Homa Bay with a coffin so being allowed through, but then found with the coffin empty and just a ruse to flout the rules. And so it goes on.....

Kenya is isolating & quarantining people who have been in contact with positive patients in schools and hotels as people are not trusted to quarantine themselves. We hear the conditions in these facilities are bad and a number of people being quarantined have escaped. Well, so far Kenya has not has many cases, but then again not so many people have been tested – right now the country is short of swabs to carry out the testing. How long God will spare us we have no idea but the whole situation is very worrying, and I cannot imagine is much better in most of Africa.

On a personal level I must say it is all harder to deal with than I had imagined. Having lived through the early HIV era and all the fears around that, and the tragedy of the Ziegler's accident I thought I was quite hardened but somehow this is different, so much uncertainty. Barbara is staying in a rural place, Kithoka, much more isolated and hopefully much safer than Maua. At least I have my cats to make me smile and bring my blood pressure down!

Anyway, it is a time to rely on God to see us through and trust in Him whatever happens and whichever way things go.

God Bless and stay safe,

Claire

