

‘UJENI’

Rob leaves Malawi

Rob Krysiak, Rita, and Lukasz Krysiak left Malawi on 22 June 2023 after serving in the country on different terms since 2003.

Rob has been working as the co-director of UNC Project laboratories, which he has developed to a 4-star rating. Rob has also overseen the development and facelifting of several medical laboratories in Malawi through projects like the Fleming Malawi Country Grant.

Rob thanked the UNC Project Malawi family for all the collaborative efforts in building the Project that is now, mentioning all the departments.

“The UNC Project team has been fantastic. Growth potential of UNC is amazing. I also give thanks to my wife Rita and son Lukasz for their support. We wish you all best,” he said.

Speaking during the function, UNC Project Malawi’s Country Director Innocent Mofolo thanked Rob for unwavering support to the country.

“Rob dedicated his life to serving Malawians. You can testify by what he has achieved in and outside UNC Project. The laboratories that we have are one of the best. He made sure that we operated to international standards,” said Mofolo.

He added that Rob had the gift of transforming every space into a good laboratory. “If you go to CHSU, you will see his works.”

Mofolo also said that Rob’s leaving Malawi was not for good as he would occasionally be visiting the country to assist.

Among other speakers, on behalf of departments, were Human Resources and Administration Manager Andrew Machado, Fleming Malawi Country Grant Manager Dr. Titha Dzowela and Laboratory Liaison Officer James Kaphatika who all thanked Rob for his contribution in the development of laboratories in Malawi within and outside UNC Project.

* ujeni (connecting, filler word) uumm. A Chichewa word Rob liked to use.

This is how far we've come:

Rob reminisces days when 1.5 Mb floppy drives were in use at UNC Project

Photos: Ganizani Chilewani



UNC Project Malawi Country Director Innocent Mofolo presenting a gift to Rob Krysiak



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Participants from UNC Project and KCH Photos: Chifuniro Mipando

LIFT-UP STUDY ON THE CARDS



Dr. Emily Njuguna making a presentation

Staff from PATH facilitated a Human-Centered Design (HCD) workshop at the Tidziwe Lecture Hall from Tuesday 27 June to Thursday 29 June 2023 in preparation for LIFT-UP study.

The three-day training was designed for three groups of participants: group 1. regional leadership, hospital/facility leadership; group 2. clinical leadership- pediatrics and/or neonatology, (neonatal, postnatal maternal care lactation; nutrition and group 3. nursing and support services: (matrons, nurses, infection control, quality assurance, milk kitchen, (lab services).

Mofolo said LIFT-UP is a follow up to the LIFE study whose results were disseminated in 2022.

The workshop aimed at getting ideas on how to support underweight babies and their mothers.

Guest of honour during the opening ceremony, who is also Kamuzu Central Hospital Director Dr. Jonathan Ngoma said that as a hospital, they were keen on executing five core functions which were: provision of medical services, referrals, teaching, research and building international collaborations like the one with UNC Project.

He emphasized that there was more need to support premature babies.

“We need to promote initiatives that support life like this one,” he said.

UNC Project Country Director Mr. Innocent Mofolo thanked the participants for coming to the training, saying they would play a crucial role in the LIFT-UP pilot study.

“Your coming to the meeting is very important. It will help in the implementation of the up-coming project,” he said.

Dr. Emily Njuguna a pediatrician and newborn care advocate from Kenya, among other trainers from PATH shared experiences from Kenya on preterm baby feeding.

On the other hand, Dr. Tisu Mvalo who was the principal investigator for LIFE in Lilongwe also shared his team’s experiences in the study.

The training had sessions on the following major topics: exploring the current status quo newborn feeding, lactation support and newborn feeding, and exploration for components of the implementation package.



This publication is produced in-house. Its purpose is to strengthen community ties by communicating information relevant and crucial to UNC Project Malawi’s operations. In a drive to increase participation and bring variety to the publication, all UNC Project staff are free and encouraged to contribute articles in this publication. Write ups are welcome in the range of 400 – 600 words for events and a maximum of 1000 words for other technical issues worth sharing.

Forward your contributions to: csekeleza@unclilongwe.org

Graphic layout:



Congratulations Dr. Mvalo

We congratulate Dr. Tisungane Mvalo, MD who was promoted to Associate Professor of General Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine (UNC School of Medicine - Pediatrics) effective June 1, 2023. Dr. Mvalo has been a faculty member in Pediatrics since 2016. Dr. Mvalo practices at Kamuzu Central Hospital in Lilongwe, Malawi.



Congratulations on your winning logo!

Scientific Director Prof. Mina Hosseinipour and Country Director Mr. Innocent Mofolo award Mr. Wongani Jumbo, the librarian, who won the logo design competition for PRI3SM study on 15 June 2023. The logo won due to its use of UNC Project colors, the map of Malawi (which voters valued for showing where the work is being done), and the ability to represent the work even without words.

Photos: Callisto Sekeleza

UNC PROJECT PEOPLE

DR. SHIRAZ KHAN

New pathologist in town

Briefly tell us about yourself.

I was raised in Blantyre. I went to different primary schools but I was selected to St. Patrick's Secondary School (Mzedi, Chiradzulu) from Chichiri Primary School. Thereafter, I was also selected to University of Malawi - College of Medicine. We are four siblings in our family. One is a lawyer and the other two are businesspersons.

How did you join the medical profession?

Ever since I was young, I always wanted to do medicine. No question about that. When I was in secondary school, I worked hard so that I would be able to qualify to medical school. Luckily as I completed secondary school, the College of Medicine was just starting pre-med programme and I was among the pioneers in January 2002. Thus from MSCE, I went straight into the one year pre-med programme. After the pre-med, I went into the actual MBBS in 2003.

So how did you develop interest to be a pathologist?

When I was exposed to pathology during medical school, I thought it was interesting. You know pathology is the mother of medicine and you have to go through it in medical school. Thus in the back of my mind, I thought this was something I might want to pursue in future.

When I graduated in 2007, I came to the Kamuzu Central Hospital (KCH) for internship. As I was doing internship, apart from other needs in the health service delivery, I saw the need for pathology in the country. During that time, we did not have the pathology lab in Lilongwe. Samples used to be sent to Blantyre and the turnaround time would be months. I saw the gap and thought it was something I could pursue.

How did you first join UNC Project?

After my internship at KCH, I was posted to Ntcheu District Hospital where I worked for two years. At first, I was the district medical officer in 2009 and then I was made district health officer.

However, I also had interest in research; it was something I wanted to learn. So one time, when late Charles van der Horst from UNC at Chapel Hill was visiting Ntcheu under the PMTCT programme, we had a chat. I told him my interest in research and all that. He told me I could join UNC Project and then I applied to work here. I resigned from government and came to UNC Project in September 2011. I also knew that UNC gives scholarship to doctors so I was motivated to learn the research part and also have an opportunity for further studies.

I started with MAVAC (malaria vaccine trial), then ACTG, PROMISE and I also did some studies with Dr. Lameck Chinula and Dr. Jennifer



Tang. Then I left for further studies in 2017.

I went to University of Kwazulu Natal in Durban to study Anatomical Pathology. The course lasts 4 or 5 years.

What are the main items on the academic menu for this course?

There is surgical pathology, cytology, and forensic pathology. You get into the programme and go through steps. The exams come in two parts. Once you register, and within 18 months, you can qualify for the part one exams. When you pass part one, you qualify for part two. You need to have done a minimum of 50 autopsies to qualify for part two exams. These are academic autopsies. Once you pass the part two exams, you are now a fellow.

How is the course work distributed in terms of theory, and practice?

It is a challenging course. You do get academic teaching here and there but it's mostly self-driven. You see practical cases under supervision. The teaching is mostly one on one. For example, in a week, they would give me 50 biopsies and after working on them I would present them to a consultant who would tell me where I was wrong or could improve. We had core books for the course and occasionally we had tests. For example, for part 1 the core book was "Robins". One had to read that book from cover to cover. Sometimes during the programme they would

test you to see if you had covered enough ground. For part 2 we also had another book. The books are for the basic knowledge you must have, but you also have to read other books.

What are the other types of pathology, apart from the one you were studying?

When people hear 'pathology', most of them confuse it with forensic pathology but this is just another specialization. We have forensic pathology, anatomical pathology, chemical pathology. In the laboratory setting, we also have microbiology. However, the ones, which have the word 'pathology' at the end, are the three. The ones that are closely related are forensic pathology and anatomical pathology. In anatomical pathology most of the work is surgical pathology and cytology. In the surgical pathology part we are looking at biopsies (extracts taken from 'diseased' part of the body) to determine the disease or its cause. We can also do that using cytology. We also do autopsies which are in two types; academic autopsies whereby the cause of the death is natural but we do it to find out what the cause of that 'natural' death is. It's detailed and we check everything. Then there is forensic autopsy where the cause of death is unnatural. Unnatural would for instance be a case where somebody has hung themselves. A forensic pathologist would check if the cause of death came from the hanging

or it was preceded by a shot, stab or poison. Sometimes there would be a gray area, for instance, when someone was sick and then went for surgery and they die, we ask if the person died from the surgery itself or from the disease? Thus, sometimes forensic and anatomical pathology work together.

Do you major on your specialization after some time in the course or you start right from the beginning?

It depends on where you are studying but in most places, forensic and anatomical pathology would be two different programmes. In most cases forensic pathology would be whole different programme lasting four years. Of course, after studying anatomical pathology it would not take you the whole four years to study forensic pathology.

So what qualification did you get after your studies?

It's a Master of Medicine in Anatomical Pathology. It's a fellowship.

Now as a pathologist with UNC Project, what does your work entail?

The first task is service provision, since our pathology lab is connected to Kamuzu Central Hospital. Whatever they send us, we interpret and give reports. At UNC Project I will also be involved in research for some studies and in the future I also hope to do some studies of my own.

So what are the prerequisites for one to study pathology?

You need to be a doctor who has been registered, has done internship, and has interest in pathology. Some schools would conduct interview and even give exams before they take you on board just to see how serious you are. The course is one of the toughest in medicine and nobody (the mentors) would want to you to waste their time.

How many were you in your group?

We were six from different countries. Two of us are the ones who have finished as of now.

Does you being a pathologist now exempt you from doing other medical roles you have been doing before?

I am registered as a medical practitioner with the Medical Council and I do not think that exempts me from practicing while I will also be registered as a specialist pathologist. However, it's highly unlikely that I will be doing what I used to do as a medical officer because my mind is now focused on pathology. There is a shortage of pathologists in the country as we speak and the amount of work now is huge. Currently, I am the fourth anatomical pathologist in Malawi. Out of the four, three of us are here in Lilongwe at UNC Project while one is in Blantyre. The samples from Mzuzu (northern Malawi) come to Lilongwe.



PICTORIAL FOCUS

YOU MIGHT HAVE MISSED THIS!

Participants in the protocol training (20-21 June 2023) for the Syphilis Bio4S Study: A Biorepository of Specimens for Syphilis Diagnostics Collected from Participants with Well-Characterized Syphilis. The aim of this study is to conduct a longitudinal, multi-site study of participants confirmed with untreated primary, secondary, or early latent syphilis to improve clinical care and diagnostics for syphilis. This will be a multi-national study that will be conducted in Malawi, United States of America and Colombia. Conducting the training were Dr. Arlene Sena, the US PI for the study and Jenna Luna, the nurse coordinator for the study at the UNC Infectious Disease Clinic. The participants were the UNC STI Research team, LLDHO STI clinic team (clinicians, nurses and others), Lighthouse STI clinic team (nurses) and HIV Diagnostic Assistants from MACRO. Photo: Chifuniro Mipando



Right: Officials from World Health Organisation (From left: Magnus Unemo, Phiona Murongwe and Yamuna Mundande) visit UNC Project on 14 June 2023 for a briefing on the capacity of the organisation's laboratories in preparation for the Enhanced Gonococcal Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance Programme to be implemented by UNC Project on behalf of the Ministry of Health, and sponsored by the organisation. Photos: Callisto Sekeleza



Left: Luscent the violinist plays during official handover for a two-classroom block at Nafutsa School on 31 May 2023. Right: CDH Chief Business Development Officer Benson Jambo, Primary Education Advisor Judith Chiwoko (guest of honour) and UNC Project Country Director Innocent Mofolo.

Photo: Chifuniro Mipando



New STI clinic construction starts at Bwaila: A generous gift from Hyman and Marietta Bielsky will fund a new clinic at Bwaila Hospital, Malawi for reproductive health and sexually transmitted infections. The new clinic will replace infrastructure some of which constructed in the 1950s and has recently been used for sexually transmitted disease research and care. Photo: Innocent Mofolo