

A Deeper Look..... looking into the lives of people and projects that are making a difference in Malawi.....

Farewell to Professor C. Bowie: 8 years with the College of Medicine.

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Thengo Kavinya talks to Prof. Bowie about his time in Malawi with the College of Medicine



Prof Bowie (left) with some of his graduates

As the College of Medicine (Malawi) continues to expand it is sad that more and more specialists who have helped in making the institution obtain outstanding recognition with the outside world keep saying goodbye. The last 8 years has seen the College of Medicine introduce the Masters of Public Health programme under the Community Health Division and the founder of the programme, Dr Cameron Bowie, will be heading back home after serving the College for 8 years. I had a chat with him on his life and stay in the country and on his plans for the future. He explains more.

“I was born 64 years ago in Britain, obtained my MBBS in 1968 at the University of London and took a medical career in paediatrics. However I turned to public health when as a consultant paediatrician in New Guinea, I was asked to take on the role of Provincial Health Officer by the Ministry of Health.” Asked how he came to work in Malawi the Professor explained “I had an interest in international health having worked through short term consultancies in UK and overseas and a friend, Professor Tim Cullinan, the first Community Health professor in the College had retired and said the College was looking for a replacement and might even accept me! So I applied and come for interview, which

was conducted by Professor Broadhead who was the Dean at the time, Dr Chiwoza Bandawe who was head of Community Health, Professor Liz Molyneux from Paediatrics and Ben Malunga, who was then Registrar. “I had flown in over a weekend and they kindly gave up their Saturday morning to interview me”, he explains. He further explains “My task was to set up the Master of Public Health programme. Since introduced in 2003 over 170 people have so far pursued it.”

Professor Bowie applauds the great changes he has seen since coming to the college. “I can say the College has expanded greatly as witnessed by the number of students and courses. It was splendid to hold the recent research dissemination conference in the two new lecture theaters which were not just comfortable, but allowed us to see and hear the presentations so well. The other thing I applaud is that I have seen that Malawians have now taken over key positions in running the college departments and not just in Community Health which has always had a Malawian HOD since I have been here”.

On the challenges he explains that striving to make the MPH of international recognition was his greatest challenge. “But we also had to build a strong research base to encourage Malawian public health physicians to return to the College, and I believe we have achieved that. Indeed I suspect we have one of the strongest community health departments on the continent”. He also explains that his personal research interest has been about poverty and HIV/AIDS.

Prof Bowie says he will be going back home but will make frequent visits to the country. “I will be retiring back to England where I can’t wait to meet my grandchildren but will be coming to the country 3-4 times a year to help students with their theses and to help MPH graduates put what they have learnt on the course into practice on the ground.

He concludes:

“I have learnt in Malawi more than I have taught. From what you have taught me, my advise to you all is to preserve your culture, which has so many enviable features, as you develop your nation. Your strength lies in your “uMunthu” heritage, and is, of course, the reason why Community Health is so important in the College and the country.”

During his free time Cameron enjoys bird watching, walking, reading and listening to music.