

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

## Farewell to Professor E Gomo

**“The college has got a strong clinical research environment and is developing into a very attractive site for Clinical trials.....”**



**Prof E Gomo**

The College of Medicine and its collaborators have in the past years generated high quality health research and the findings have enabled Malawi to improve the management of health-related conditions and to formulate relevant health programs and policies. Furthermore, research activities have accorded Malawian graduates and scientists an opportunity to receive hands-on research training and obtain higher academic qualifications. Research at the College is hosted in different departments and coordinated by the Research Support Centre. The Research Support Centre's mission is to support local researchers in the design and conduct of clinical research, introduce International Conference on Harmonisation (ICH) - Good Clinical Practice (GCP) quality research standards, provide comprehensive ongoing training (GCP, Study Methodology, Data management, etc.) and to develop a research agenda and climate that will allow successful competition for international grants that impact local health policy. I had an opportunity to talk with the outgoing director of the centre, Associate Professor Exnevia Gomo about his research career. He explains.... "I hold a PhD in immunology obtained from Copenhagen University. I started my research career at Blair research institute that is under the Ministry of Health in Zimbabwe in 1988 where I worked as a biological laboratory scientist and then become a senior medical scientist after the establishment of the HIV/AIDS research unit in 1994. In 2003 I joined the University of Zimbabwe as a Professor in immunology and mentored and supervised PhD and MSc students in various research projects". He further explains that in the same year he was appointed director of traditional medicine in the same ministry to help set up the framework for traditional medicines research. He then joined the University of Malawi as director of the Research Support Centre in 2007.

Gomo explains that a person who is conducting research can be called a researcher but not everyone can become one, "anybody can't conduct research, it's a career and like all careers is a calling and researchers should have interest and have a passion to build necessary research skills. The entry level is deemed as the first degree or having a higher degree by doing either a total research course or by conducting research to develop some necessary research skills". He

explains that the most crucial point is developing a skill of writing a proposal (proposals that attract funding). He adds that exposure and mentorship play a significant in developing research skills but the most structured way is a PhD.

Prof Gomo outlined that research can be beneficial to communities if the benefits of it are cascaded to the communities. "If the end product of a health research is turned into a treatment I guess that's a benefit. The information that gets to the publics is not raw research but a product that helps in policy implementation through the health care system. I feel what is important to communicate is the importance of research and how research is done and how the public can contribute because this will help when research is being conducted and when the information is being disseminated," he adds.

He says he sees a bright future for research at College of Medicine because of its excellent research environment. "The college has got a strong clinical research environment and is developing into a very attractive site for Clinical trials and hopefully will continue to grow especially if the regulatory aspects are fairly and well developed". He also adds that he sees a lot of activities coming up in non-clinical research but said the focus should be on academic base in the areas of operational research because it directly supports health care delivery and also advises that the institution should also focus more on basic research because this involves multi disciplinary research which helps to build different research disciplines in a single project.

Professor Gomo says the three years he's been with the Research Support Centre has been one of his most exciting moments in his career, "I have enjoyed being part of the team that has helped developing the RSC and having the systems running such as the research info system (Website & Newsletter), drafting of the college specific research policy and restructuring and refining of grants management procedures into a standard managements adopted by research intensive Universities internationally". He further says the RSC have managed to develop high quality courses that are accepted by researchers and that have helped in introducing GCP standards in the college and establishment of the data management unit that is able to handle studies. Gomo says having been part of setting up the RSC its time to move ahead and face some new challenges, "I feel the systems are running and will continue to run and once I return home I will engage in full time research and do some part time lecturing".

During his free time Exnevia likes to read and also to watch some sports more especially boxing. He finishes by applauding the teamwork and hard work of the RSC staff that has seen it delivering.