

Basic Medicines in South Sudan

Much of the work of the Salisbury Sudan Medical Link (SML) is to facilitate the flow of basic medicines into South Sudan. The cost of even the simplest of drugs has risen sharply as they have to be imported and then stored and distributed to the rural clinics. Without these essential tools the work of the nurses, midwives and clinical officers cannot continue.

Reliable drugs are not produced in South Sudan so all drugs have to be imported. Some come from neighbouring Uganda whilst others are imported from reliable sources in India. Drugs are ordered in bulk to try to keep the price of packaging and distribution to a minimum.

Border checks are stringent and time consuming and the SML is reliant on reliable agents at the borders and in the capital Juba who will oversee this transfer of drugs from overseas.

It may seem strange to you that even basic drugs to treat pneumonia or malaria or arthritis have to come so far. These diseases if left unchecked may lead to early death or considerable disability.

Within South Sudan the distribution of drugs has been a nightmare for several months. The roads are controlled by militias often made up of trigger happy boy soldiers. Individuals cannot safely visit relatives outside of their towns. Similarly vans carrying precious life changing drugs cannot risk being stopped and vandalised.

So a far more expensive route has had to be found. Private and civilian and charity based airlines such as MAF have been found to deliver packages of drugs to remote places. This has almost doubled the price of the drugs.

Some of the clinics have produced optimistic wish lists of drugs that they could use if they were available. However, SML has persisted with a basic list of drugs which has proven to be sufficient. As the militias move around, some areas that previously were 'no go' areas such as Ezo province have now become safe again and recently drugs consignments were delivered safely by road.

The training of clinical officers and nurses in South Sudan continues through all this conflict. Do pray for the teachers and students that they will be protected. One year is graduating this month and we hope and pray that they will be deployed to clinics where there are at least basic essential drugs so that they can use the skills they have gained through their training.

John Rennie