

Exotic Tropical Diseases

Medicine in sub Saharan Africa has many diseases which are unknown in the west. Guinea worm is one of these tropical diseases and bold attempts over many years have been made to control it. Guinea worm has been a most unpleasant infection in all parts of South Sudan. People become infected from stagnant water or collecting water in shallow wells. People are infected by drinking the contaminated water. The parasite migrates through to the skin causing blisters which are exceptionally painful. They usually emerge through the feet causing ulcers which are difficult to heal, and leave patients unable to walk or attend school. There is no known cure for this infestation.

In the past three years South Sudan has succeeded in interrupting the transmission of this parasite. With the help of wealthy philanthropists water supplies have been improved, swampy land drained and wells replaced by pumps. South Sudan which used to be the most highly infected country in the world reported no cases in 2017, down from nearly 21,000 in 2006. This is a commendable achievement given the insecurity which still plagues much of the country and the fragmented health service that continues.

As the life cycle of the parasite is almost a year, the 15 month absence of cases indicates that the infestation has been curtailed. A three year surveillance period now begins. Guinea worm like polio is well on its way to eradication and may follow smallpox into the history books.

The Sudan Medical Link raises funds for the education of clinical officers and nurses. These trainees would be taught about a wide variety of tropical diseases, how they can be identified, prevented and where appropriate cured. When the nurses are qualified and assigned to rural clinics they find themselves in the front line combating such infestations such as guinea worm but also reporting cases and encouraging preventative measures such as providing safe water supplies.

Two major fund raising activities for the Sudan Medical Link are imminent. On June 17th at South Canonry in Salisbury Close, the annual Garden Party will take place and on July 5th a Soiree in Cranborne Manor (6.30pm; tickets from sandmalp@hotmail.com). Do come, you are most welcome and be part of the team combating even the most exotic of tropical diseases.

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