

**2021 M3 Conference**  
**Q&A with Jon Fielder, MD**  
*“Where do People get their Medical Care?”*

**CLICK LINK TO WATCH SESSION: <https://youtu.be/ooouof7Ug2LY>**

**Explain how Christian mission hospitals have been providing quality medical care for people in remote areas of Africa for 50-100 years?**

One example is Kijabe Hospital (Kenya); it started in 1915. Another hospital partner of ours in Malawi called Nkhoma Hospital also started in 1915. Where I spend my clinical time now, Maua Hospital, began in 1928, and it is pretty established now, but you can imagine what it was like in 1928. There is a great photo at Kijabe Hospital of Dr. Barnett, the founder of the modern hospital, possibly taken in the 1950's where he's dressing someone's wound on a hillside. That is the kind of hands-on care that would not have been available to people without the mission hospitals. These hospitals have really deep roots in their communities, and their legacy goes back fifty, seventy-five, a hundred years.

**In your experience, do you often find vibrant mission hospitals in remote areas?**

Absolutely. As Pastor Oscar of a Nairobi chapel said, “the missionaries came, and they had their model.” They went to a rural area, they planted the church, they started the school, and they started the hospital or the clinic. So now you have these mission stations historically dotted all around Africa, particularly in the rural areas. It's been a lot of sacrifice by both missionaries and their African Christian colleagues to keep those places going.

**How do you find sustainable teaching materials and curricula to use for teaching? What curricula have you found to be most useful?**

Most of my teaching is at the bedside. That is the component most lacking here. I usually generate presentations from patients we see, addressing questions that arise from those patients. Years ago, we developed our own HIV clinical curriculum, and now there is a national HIV curriculum that we use in our training program. We also developed our own TB curriculum based on a book that I wrote.

**African Mission Healthcare (AMH), the organization you co-founded, yearly provides an award that gives a mission hospital \$2.5 million over a ten-year period. How will this award elevate the care and the ability for these hospitals to function?**

The idea behind the Mission Hospital Teaching Network (MHTN) was to initially come alongside to help what we were calling emerging mission teaching hospitals. These are hospitals that did a little bit of medical education but had plans or were starting to do post graduate medical education and other special programs. Now, we are in the process of expanding that to add more sites to the network, including some of the more mature mission hospitals like Kijabe Hospital and Tenwek Hospital, although at a little bit lower level of support. The idea is to come alongside and listen to what their needs are because each hospital is going to have different needs. For example, I'm an HIV doctor and that's my specialty, but most of these places have pretty well-resourced HIV programs, so we don't come in and say, ‘we are here to help you with HIV,’ but instead we listen to what their individual needs are and decide how best we can help. Then, with the consistency of provision that the MHTN award provides, these hospitals are able to think ahead and plan out goals to reach

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ranging from training a family medicine resident or a surgery resident, to equipment needs, to building housing. That's the idea behind the Mission Hospital Teaching Network and the support it provides to help raise the level and sustainability of medical education and patient care in Africa.

### **How was African Mission Healthcare (AMH) founded and what is the mission of the organization?**

My good friend Mark Gerson, a Jewish entrepreneur, investor, and philanthropist who saw the incredible value of Christian medical missionaries and mission hospitals, and I co-founded African Mission Healthcare in 2010. We recognized that mission hospitals provide 1/3 of all medical care in Africa, as well as a large part of the health worker training. We also recognized that the support for these important institutions was steadily waning, leaving a huge unmet need on the continent. We perceived that filling the gap and investing financially in medical missionaries and mission hospitals in Africa offered the potential for an incredible return on investment. Of course, we weren't looking for a financial return. Instead, the goal/mission was to sustainably change the quality of lives through improved access to excellent, compassionate healthcare. This led to launch African Mission Healthcare. You can learn more about African Mission Healthcare at [www.africanmissionhealthcare.org](http://www.africanmissionhealthcare.org).

### **What are some of your experiences of sharing Christ with those around you in the mission field?**

I've worked a lot with trainees who are already Christian. I've really tried to come alongside them. They have disciplesd me and mentored me spiritually more than I have done them. What I've been able to bring to our mutual relationship are the skills and the background that I have as a clinician. Sometimes they have come from medical education institutions where they didn't have the opportunity for a lot of close mentorship. So, I see my role as coming alongside them and empowering them as rising influential healthcare leaders.

### **What is the status of COVID vaccine availability in Sub-Saharan Africa?**

That's a good question. It does vary by country; the vaccines are just starting to arrive. There was a shipment into Kenya about a week ago of the AstraZeneca vaccine. My admittedly limited knowledge is that they'll start at some of the bigger referral hospitals as distribution centers. I haven't heard of that happening yet where I am, but I believe that is the plan. Regarding other countries, I saw that Ghana has started to receive vaccine. South Africa received some AstraZeneca vaccine, but a recent study showed that maybe the AstraZeneca vaccine was not right for the South African variant, so they have now switched, but I'm not sure which one they are using, but some programs have started. (Answer provided March 10, 2021)

### **How is COVID impacting physicians getting into these countries?**

The number of short-term medical missionaries and visiting students have declined dramatically. Almost all long-term medical missionaries remained, unless they already had a furlough scheduled.

### **Has the pandemic had an impact on your ability to procure certain medical supplies?**

PPE was in very short supply--and very expensive--initially. Things have improved. I have noticed some shortages in the market but not dramatic. One problem is that the hospitals' financial situation has been very negatively impacted, making it more difficult to pay staff and buy supplies.