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UBC midwifery students sign on for African expedition

By Cheryl Rossi-Staff writer

Students Aisia Salo and Chloe Dayman work on a Ugandan woman last year as part of UBC's Midwifery Global Placement Initiative.

When Dr. Mickey Rostoker worked in Uganda last year, he noted how the hospitals there lacked modern equipment, medication and even basic medical supplies.

"There's a lot of international aid that's coming in," said the family physician, who splits his time between Vancouver and Regina. "But some of the places at the end of the line don't get fed some of that international money because it's spent elsewhere before it can even get there." He noted some hospitals use razor blades to perform episiotomies, or surgical incisions involving a woman's vulva, and they make the incision without local anesthetic. Rostoker was in Uganda last year with UBC's Midwifery Global Placement Initiative, a program his wife Cathy Ellis, who is a midwife instructor, started three years ago. He'll head there again this summer with Ellis, three midwifery students and medical supplies.

Student Chloe Dayman also took the trip last year and raised her own money to pay for it. "They had hardly anything at all," she said. "Basically you go into the room and there'd be a bed with no sheets or anything like that. The woman would come with their own plastic sheets to deliver their baby on and then they dispose of it afterwards_ They had no blood pressure cuffs, nothing to take your temperature with."

The experience was invaluable she says, particularly because of the number of births they assisted while in Uganda. She and another student attended 60 deliveries in six weeks.

"We as midwives in B.C. usually do about four to eight births a month," she said.

Dayman also saw different attitudes when it came to delivery among Ugandan women.

"The women there pushed out their babies in 10 or 15 minutes, a first baby. That was really normal," she said. "If the baby wasn't coming out in 10 or 15 minutes, they'd start to do other things to try to get it going or start to get upset because it wasn't happening fast enough." Rostoker, who's wife is in Kosovo following up a midwife training project there, said Ellis started the international placement program at UBC so her students could gain international, crosscultural and midwifery experience. Working in Africa with her as part of the project gives him a chance to spend time with Ellis and teach technical skills to Uganda healthcare workers.

"I will also do some post-abortal work over there because although it's illegal, there are lots of women who undergo illegal terminations and then they end up coming quite sick to the hospital," he said.

Heather Nelson, a third year midwifery student, is one of five who are off to Africa this June. Three students will work in Uganda and two in Zambia.

She and another student have raised \$4,500 to buy medical supplies, mostly soliciting family and friends. Ellis collected in-kind donations of knitted hats, booties and blankets.

May 5 marks the International Day of the Midwife. Nelson said those who want to honour the day could donate money to their project until mid-May so they can buy additional medical supplies.

For more information, contact UBC's midwifery department at 604-822-0352.