Learning about OPHTHALMOGISTS in the North West Region

In this week’s edition, we are thrilled to learn more about the important work of two expert ophthalmologists, Dr. Marvice Okwen, and Dr Beyiah Kamsang Pius. Both work at Mbingo Baptist Hospital, part of the Cameroon Baptist Convention Health Services in the North West Region of Cameroon.

Dr Marvice Okwen: “I am an ophthalmologist by profession and my sub specialty is pediatric ophthalmology and squinting. I am basically involved in managing eye diseases in both children and adults. I see patients in clinic and perform minor and major operations when indicated. I love mentoring the younger ones because I know that none of works alone.”

Dr. Beyiah Kamsang Pius recently graduated as an ophthalmologist from the University of Nairobi, and returned to the North West Region to practise. “I have an interest in what is called oculoplastics – that just means the surgical procedures for the eye socket, eyelids, tear ducts, and the face. I can do surgery to reconstruct eyes that have been damaged. I am passionate about using good evidence in my practice.”

What is ophthalmology, and what is an ophthalmologist?

Ophthalmology is the branch of medicine that deals with eyes – the anatomy, physiology, and diseases of the eyeball and the orbit of the eye.

An Ophthalmologist is a medical doctor who has completed extra training in eyes. First the person has to achieve a medical degree, and then the ophthalmologist continues training for an additional 5 years. An additional 1-2 years of studies are completed, in an area of interest, such as pediatrics, glaucoma, oculoplastics, or retina. When you see an ophthalmologist, they will interpret the results from the testing completed by the ophthalmic technician, and do further investigation by looking at the health and anatomy of the eyes through specialized equipment as well as performing a refraction on the eyes to determine if glasses will aid the patient. After the exam, the doctor will discuss the results with the patient.

Why do rehabilitation and inclusive development workers need to know about ophthalmology?
Anyone and everyone can develop eye problems. A patient with any form of disability may have problems with vision, which most times can be managed. As such, we really encourage all DID and rehabilitation providers to acquaint themselves with the various eye services we have in the region, so that referrals can be made at any time.

Everyone working in the NWR should be aware that there are three main institutions providing quality eye care services in the region, both clinical and surgical services. These institutions are mainly faith based hospitals, the Catholic, Baptist, and Presbyterian hospitals. However there are many others like Sohdecam, Abii Specialist, World Vision, and Mezam Polyclinic. People should get to know the different services that are offered in different organizations.

At the moment, in the NWR, we have 4 resident ophthalmologists (doctors training for their speciality). One is working with the Catholic hospital, and 3 are working for CBC Health Services. Other institutions have visiting ophthalmologists and ophthalmic nurses and technicians. They offer clinical services and refer surgical cases accordingly. It is an exciting field and constantly changing and improving.

**Who are your mentors?**

**Dr. Marvice:** One of my mentors is Dr Godfrey Furahini, a young and hard working pediatric ophthalmologist and squint surgeon at KCMC (Kilimanjaro Christian Medical College) Moshi, Tanzania. He taught me selflessly and patiently during my sub specialty training. He always told me he wants me to know everything he knows, and that he will be proud to see perform even better than him. That really meant a lot to me!

**Dr. Pius:** I have as my mentors Prof Ilako at the University of Nairobi, who was instrumental for me to have a chance to be trained in ophthalmology. Prof Ilako saw me through my first steps in cataract surgery. Dr Tebid Marvice has been of tremendous support and a great coach as I started my practice as an ophthalmologist. And I can’t forget Dr Alice Nchifor, who is always coaching me spiritually.

**Why is teamwork and collaboration important in your vision work?**

*Both Dr. Marvice and Dr. Pius* talked about how important team work and collaboration are to their practice. They believe that team work and collaboration create room for better quality eye care through sharing ideas. When there is good team work, difficult cases are discussed and best possible management offered to patients.

“Ophthalmology is a unique specialty such that one person cannot successfully practice in all the various subspecialties as such optimal outcomes can only be achieved via collaboration of respective subspecialties as well as with other cadre in eye care.”

“Collaboration also provides opportunities to grow professionally through learning from colleagues and getting updates in ophthalmology. It is important because by collaborating, we can tell which services are available in the various eye institutions and this facilitates referrals and feedback.”

“I really believe that collaboration and teamwork creates a more friendly atmosphere, thereby eliminating any inferiority or superiority complexes that may exist, and can reduce conflicts between co workers and between institutions.”
What is Vision 2020?

**VISION 2020: The Right to Sight** is the global initiative for the elimination of avoidable blindness. It is a joint programme of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB). Many people in the NWR are working toward this goal.

“A world in which nobody is needlessly visually impaired, where those with unavoidable vision loss can achieve their full potential.”

What are your key messages for rehabilitation and health care workers in NWR?

**Dr. Marvice** is fully committed and passionate about her work, and it shows in everything she does. As you can see from the comments above, she strongly believes that we need more collaboration between institutions, both those that offer eye care services, and all others, if we have to offer quality eye care services in order to meet up with Vision 2020.

Dear readers, Dr. Marvice and Dr. Pius have the following messages for you:

“We need to be able to differentiate cases we can manage and those we need to refer. And then refer the people that need to go to another provider.”

“We need to be more concerned with eye health care of the patients rather than the financial gain of the institution.”

“We need to organize seminars on eye care for everyone, including all health and rehab workers.”

“The population will benefit from eye health education through radio and TV programs, health talks in places of worship, markets, and schools.”

“We need to know ourselves as stakeholders and work together to fight avoidable blindness in our region.”

**If you want to support Dr. Marvice and Dr. Pius in their vision for better eye care services in the region, please contact them directly. They would love to hear from you!**

Many thanks to both of these amazing doctors for sharing their work and insights with us!

Resources

Want to know more about eye care in the region? Read this new article! Congratulations, Dr. Okwen! (If you need help getting a pdf version, let one of know.)


Thanks for reading! Feel free to share this newsletter with others.