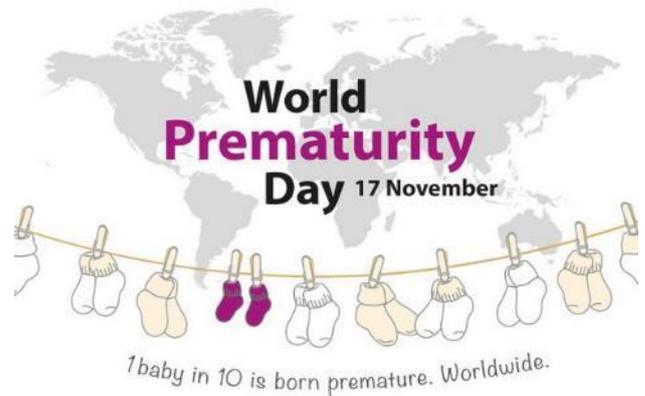


A Letter from Michelle

Mukinge Hospital, PO Box 120092, Kasempa, Zambia
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Dear Friends,

Did you know that the 17th November was World Prematurity Day? This is held to raise awareness of the challenges and burden of preterm birth globally. Worldwide prematurity is the leading cause of death in children under five. 15 million babies are born premature every year one million of these babies will not survive. In Zambia the preterm birth rate is estimated to be 13% (compared to 8% in the UK) and Mukinge is no exception, our neonatal nursery has a constant flow of babies coming through its doors.



Recently I have been helping out in the neonatal nursery, this is where premature babies are cared for until they are big enough to join their Mums on the ward, they need to reach 1.8kg to go to the ward and 2kg to go home. Some of these babies are with us for just a short time but many are with us for weeks if not months. The mums form a little community helping each other out, supporting each other as they care for their babies giving two hourly feeds, changing them and holding them. Days when a baby graduates to the ward or goes home are a cause for celebration with singing and dancing (literally). Days when a baby becomes sick or dies are sad days for all. The care we can offer premature babies is very

basic compared to developed countries. We can keep them warm, feed them, give oxygen, Bubble CPAP, antibiotics and ultra violet light treatment when needed but we can't ventilate or give the many advanced cares that are available in other places.



I love getting to know the mums and sharing in their joy as their babies gain weight, come off oxygen and reach other milestones. Some days however are hard, when a baby isn't gaining weight and we don't know why, when they have a heart defect that we can't fix, when they need

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more respiratory support than we can give. It's hard when you know a baby is unlikely to survive which is the reality for most of our extreme premature babies.

On a day when I was feeling down about some of our babies, I was reminded that it is not always as hopeless as it seems. One of our doctors was telling me about a lady who had brought her daughter to Mukinge to deliver her first child. They were not local and had travelled some distance past several hospitals where she could have delivered. When asked "why Mukinge?" the lady said her own daughter had been born very early and she had been delivered at Mukinge where she was cared for by Sister Michelle. I was touched that she remembered me by name but it also reminded me that there is hope and despite the odds these babies sometimes do make it.



It is always lovely when one of these babies come back to see us as the little girl in the photo in the left did. She was born 10 weeks early and had a difficult start to life spending many weeks in hospital before finally going home.

Through caring for these babies, celebrating the good days and sharing the grief of bad ones we are able, I hope, to share a little of God's love and compassion for these mums and their precious babies.

Many of you have asked how the COVID situation is here. I am happy to report that for three weeks now our COVID ward has had no patients. There are still some cases in the community but not as many as before.

Thank you for your continued interest in the work here at Mukinge, I hope this letter finds you well.

Love

Michelle