

Report January – February 2009

“At Ifakara Hospital the 4 ½ year-old sterilizers do not work and cannot be used any longer.

In the X-Ray Department both the patient identification gadget and the X-ray processor have broken down.”

By the end of 2008, these two problems were announced via E-mail to the “Association of the Friends of Ifakara”. Naturally, sterilizers are essential for a hospital; therefore a technician of Belimed Comp., who had installed both devices some years ago, had to be sent to Africa.

Preparations for that journey were not easy, for the necessary spare parts, sent by air mail, had to arrive in Dar es Salaam at the same time as the technician. Otherwise, waiting periods could arise, which of course, are to be paid.

On 27th January we had finally made it. A small team consisting of Christine Schennach as its head, the technician Franz Kirchner and Renate Schwamberger, set off for Ifakara. Franz Kirchner was to mend the sterilizers, Renate Schwamberger’s task was to start the repair- works in the X-ray Department.

At the outset, the journey proved to be rather difficult, for the elderly KLM aircraft, with destination Dar es Salaam turned round over Egypt and flew back to Amsterdam. The reason: a door didn’t close completely. At last, after a 25-hour journey the Tyrolean “tourist party” landed in Dar es Salaam and immediately plunged into the adventure of “how to get the spare parts through the customs ?” We didn’t manage it before the second attempt on the next day, and the trip to Ifakara could be started at 9 p.m. on a car of Bishop Agapiti’s from the Diocese of Mahenge. At 5 a.m. the rather exhausted travellers were welcomed in Ifakara by Sr. Christofora, who had stayed awake because of our late arrival.

It is worthy to note that our technician started working 3 hours later. We would like to spare the gentle reader any details which sometimes drove our specialists to the edge of despair. For example, it was quite a challenge to find out the proper Latin-chemical term for “formic acid”, and where to get it in Tanzania. By the way, our technician needed formic acid to open the dirty and furred water pipes. Somebody must have led dirty water into these pipes and the clean water past them, or something like that. In fact, it took the technician 2 ½ weeks to make the gadgets work again. And Franz has well deserved our admiration. It was amazing how exactly he worked, even on Saturdays and Sundays. In the end we want to point out the air temperature was 38 degrees centigrade in the shade.

Over three weeks, Christine Schennach, with her energy and knowledge, awakened the hospital and its employees from their hibernation, for she visited each department three times a day, which was quite pleasant and helpful. It proved particularly successful in the X-Ray Department, for the minor repairs, announced in E-mails, were not the problem. As luck would have it, a delegation of the Atomic Energy Commission Dar es Salaam emerged in the hospital on our first working day. The two gentlemen wanted to get informed about everything and, after thoroughly testing the X-Ray Department all day, threatened to shut it down. No wonder, the most important examination table was “frozen in” at an angle of 35° and could not be put in a horizontal position – and this since September 2008. Daring patients who tried to lie down on it felt like being at an Alpine toboggan run and had to cling desperately to the upper edge of the table so as not to slip down. This and other faults were mended under the persistent guidance of Renate Schwamberger. In addition, the most simple radiation protection rules had to be fulfilled. This was the condition to get further operation licence for 2009, so the friendly inspectors said. Additionally, the licence fee for 2008 which had so far not been paid had to be covered afterwards.

Actually, it took us three weeks to carry more or less out the most urgent repairs. To the vindication of the hospital’s honour one has to admit that it was not inability but sheer lack of money which had led to this nearly hopeless situation.

The “Association of the Friends of Ifakara” generously helped according to their possibilities and financed the necessary repairs.

After three weeks we had accomplished what can be expected of an aid organisation:

- Exact control of donated money
- To make sensible use of donations
- To guarantee a constant standard of medical care

Finally I, the author, want to underline that we have paid our journey- and accommodation costs out of our own pocket. This way all donations have entirely been of benefit to St. Francis Hospital.

Renate Schwamberger