

Alumni in Action

Dreams of Africa



I am Dr. Heidi Weinhold, 2000 alumna, who traveled to Nigeria in January 2007 with the World Health Mission. My team consisted of Dr. Dan Wagner, a pharmacist from Pittsburgh, and Danielle Wagner, a laboratory scientist. The trip was a success and we established diabetes screening clinics at Lafia, Azara, Jos, Bauchi and Yola covering many hundred miles. My team screened nearly 2,000 patients, collected data on each, and donated glucose meters, diabetic test strips, medications, herbal, and vitamin supplements. The weather is extremely dry, the air is thick with dust, people are severely dehydrated and many suffer from allergies and asthma.

The hospital conditions in Nigeria are nothing but primitive. We stayed in hospital guest houses which were considered the nicest facilities in the area, yet, we would be without water and electricity for six to eight hours at a time. Locals would get up in the middle of the night to collect water and store it in large barrels and we bathed out of buckets.

Naturopathic Medicine was very favorable to the people of Nigeria and, for many, traditional herbalists are the only form of health care they can afford. We visited with Dr. Dauda, a licensed native herbalist who has been practicing for 58 years. He lives in a remote area where the air is a little cleaner, the country is greener, people can breathe a little easier, and the termite mounds are as tall as a person.

People travel great distances to see Dr. Dauda who proudly specializes in Gonorrhoea, stomach aches, and birth attending. He has a small book containing 17,000 cases he has successfully treated, but most of the wisdom remains in his mind and is passed down to apprentices. He gave us a tour of his herb garden, and

described the use of each plant and the teas that are made from the dried bark and roots he collects. Dr. Dauda tells his patients, "Only God Heals, and to come back and pay him when they are cured." If people do not get better, they do not have to pay.

Herbal Ethnopharmacy is a growing field in Nigeria and I met with several pharmacists as well as Professor Kamiyuss Gamiani, Dean of Faculty, at the West African Network of Natural Product Research Scientists. They have many research projects analyzing the active compounds of native plants. This group is currently studying a mixture of four different plants to treat Sickle Cell Anemia. Malaria is the second leading cause of death in Nigeria and they are conducting several clinical trials on different herbal mixtures for malaria with the plant, *Artemesia*, used as the control.

Malnutrition increases the susceptibility to infectious diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV. With poor hygiene, poverty, and a lack of adequate water



supply, infectious disease spreads quickly and diarrhea is a problem. Alacer supplied Emergen-C packets that were perfect for these conditions. The Emergen-C packets were especially well received in Lafia Hospital. People with diabetes would travel and wait for hours. Many had not eaten that day and their blood sugar was too low. Emergen-C packets were opened and dispersed in waiting rooms.

Nigeria has the highest population affected by HIV in Africa. Gaia Herbs provided herbal immune support which was dispensed at the APIN Clinic in Jos where 10,000 people are currently enrolled with HIV. Seeing the crowd of over 200 people in the waiting room, knowing they are infected with HIV, is heart-wrenching. We visited the pediatric unit of the HIV hospital and dispensed Nordic Natural DHA Jr. packets to Dr. Emeka, the head pediatrician.

The trash across Nigeria was inescapable. There is not a trash collection system in place and trash is thrown out the front door and litter lines the roads. When we finished our diabetic screening clinics the floor was covered with blood soaked cotton.

As I reflect on my trip, I think that the worst thing in the world is the burden of debt, how it weighs you down, defeats you. I have dreamed of Africa, and the faces of Africa, every night. They say "don't forget us" and I will be returning to Nigeria in November. 🌿