

Teamwork to Save Babies in Uganda

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800 grams. 28.2 ounces.

That's less than two pounds of butter, and a bit more than two cans of Pepsi. It's also the weight of some of the premature babies that neonatologist Dr. Kathy Burgoine and her team take care of at the Mbale Regional Referral Hospital's Neonatal Unit (NNU), which is a project of [Born on the Edge](#).

Dr. Kathy and the NNU team partner with CURE Uganda on special cases. When children come to the unit who Kathy suspects may have hydrocephalus, she is in close contact with the CURE neurosurgeons. Neurosurgeon Dr. Justin Onen explains, "We have a strong partnership. She's (Dr. Kathy) a good communicator, and if she wants to send us a patient, she always calls us first."

When Dr. Kathy first came to Mbale, **the mortality rate for babies at the main hospital was just 52%**. More than half the babies died that were treated for prematurity, infections, or other complications. **Now, 5 years later, the mortality rate is down to just 11%.**



Neonatal Unit at Mbale

How did they do it? The answer is simple, research-based interventions that make a world of difference, and in this case, saved the lives of hundreds of babies. The interventions implemented by the NNU team of doctors and nurses are simple but powerful. Kangaroo care, continuous positive airway pressure machines, oxygen

concentrators, use of nasogastric feeding (a small tube that goes through the baby's nose down to its stomach when they are too tiny to nurse), and spoon-feeding are all relatively low-tech solutions that have a huge impact. **As Dr. Kathy explains, the key has been to consistently do the basic things right, and "simple things really do have a huge, huge impact."**

One of the patients that recently came to CURE Uganda from the NNU is baby Jenner. Born prematurely at around 28 weeks and just about 2 pounds, Jenner was losing weight rapidly when he came to the NNU. Dr. Kathy suspected that Jenner was suffering from hydrocephalus and referred him to CURE Uganda. Jenner was able to come to CURE Uganda for the scans and treatment he needed to treat his hydrocephalus while continuing to see the pediatricians at the NNU. This is a great example of how two medical teams, at two separate hospitals, worked together to get a patient all the support he needed to survive.

In October, Jenner had his first neurosurgery, which was an irrigation to help wash out the infection from his brain. In December, he had another procedure to help his cerebrospinal fluid flow more freely. In January, when he was bigger and put on some weight, he had his third neurosurgery. His mom, Gorret, continues to be in close contact both with Dr. Kathy and the team at CURE Uganda.



Baby Jenner at CURE with Neurosurgeon Dr. Jo Ling Goh

Jenner's story is just one of many examples of the close working relationship CURE Uganda has with Dr. Kathy and her team. The Mbale Regional Referral Hospital's Neonatal Unit is now the best public neonatal unit in the entire country of Uganda. We're so glad that we get to support and partner with each other as we work together to save lives.

CURE Uganda and the Mbale NNU team have a shared goal to help children thrive! Dr. Kathy said, "I absolutely love my job. In fact, it isn't a job because I don't get paid. I love the people I work with, and the potential I have each day to teach more people and share the knowledge I have with them. I have been blessed with three healthy happy girls. They bring me so much joy and love. **I love that I am able to give more women and men the opportunity to take home happy healthy babies.** Seeing the babies and families of the newborns we have cared for, and the love and smiles they bring their families makes all the hard work so worthwhile."

Thanks to the faithful work and dedication of the Mbale NNU team, hundreds of babies have been saved! Many of those babies, now toddlers, returned with their parents for the recent World Prematurity Day celebration at the hospital. Baby Jenner and his mom attended, along with a set of quadruplets! The ripple effect of lives saved, nurses and doctors trained, and knowledge gained and implemented through research done at the NNU is enormous. CURE Uganda is deeply honored to partner with Dr. Kathy and the NNU team and incredibly grateful for the transformation they are bringing to Uganda.



Dr. Kathy (green and pink) and friends celebrating on World Prematurity Day.

References:

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