

"A New Era": Health Information Resource Centers in Southern Sudan



Juba Teaching Hospital Health Information Resource Center

As a public health officer at the Southern Sudan Ministry of Health, Abdullah Rahman needed up-to-date information to support his work. Even in the capital city of Juba, it wasn't easy to find what he was looking for. "We used to look in our other books and the libraries at the ministries, or friends' books—but it is difficult, because some information you cannot find there." Reliable Internet access was another complication. "It's important for us to connect with other people," he says, and for "any news from our partners, we connect by Internet."

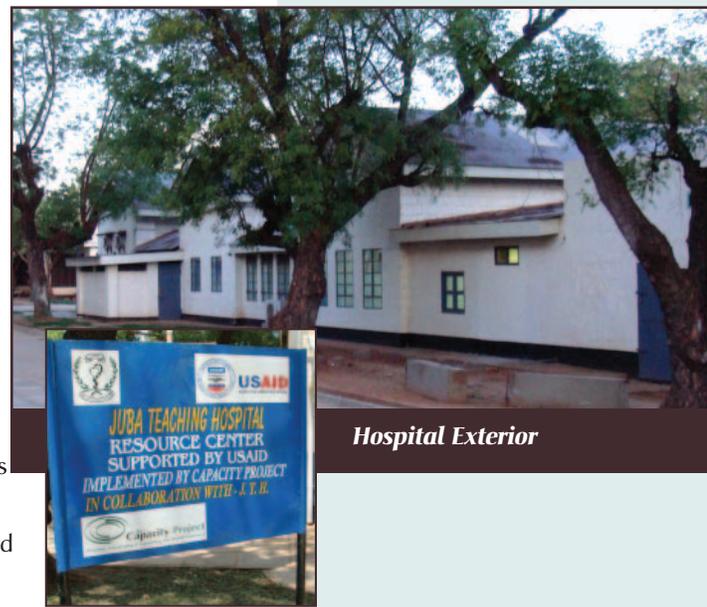
In Southern Sudan, the Capacity Project is strengthening the Ministry of Health's ability to hire, train and manage a high-quality health workforce. One objective is to implement a strategic approach to workforce development, which includes improving access to health information. The new Juba Teaching Hospital Health Information Resource Center is part of these efforts.

Opened in May 2008, the Capacity Project-supported resource center provides hospital staff, medical students and Ministry of Health personnel with print and electronic materials, library services, Internet access and computer training. The center has seven computers, all of which are connected to a wireless Internet network. The current collection of 653 items includes medical textbooks, journals, magazines, novels, videos, DVDs and CDs.

Francis Tombe is the center's manager and librarian. "Before the resource center was established," he remembers, "there was nothing." Even at the University of Juba, "most of their materials are for academic purposes," he points out, while "most of our materials are on medical subjects."

In the beginning, it wasn't easy for Tombe to convince staff to visit the center and use the materials. "When I came here," Tombe recounts, "you find it is very hard to encourage people to use the center; there is a poor reading culture. But I go around and encourage people. I keep telling them they should come, these books are very recent." Gradually he succeeded, and now "we normally get about 16 to 24 people [a day]." He

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Hospital Exterior

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adds that “the school of nursing and midwifery is immediately across the street. They come and use the resource center.”

The center provides free computer training to hospital staff for a period of 45 days. “So far the center has trained about 20 medical staff in basic computer knowledge,” says Tombe. The training sessions cover an introduction to computers, Microsoft Word, Excel, Access and PowerPoint, as well as

Internet and e-mail skills. Hospital administrators selected the trainees from a range of departments; they are now able to access health information through various websites, obtain updates and enter patient and hospital data into databases. Rahman notes that “you cannot find this training anywhere outside this center. This training helps the staff with tools to assist them in doing their jobs.”

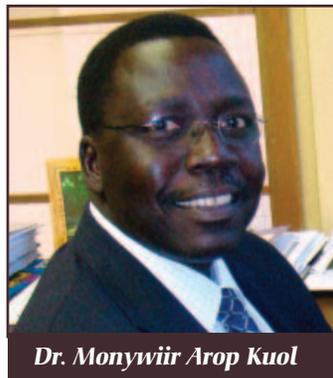
Due to the resource center’s success, a second site is in the works. The state hospital in Wau, capital of the state of Western Bahr el-Ghazal, will host a new resource center that is scheduled to open in July. The center will be staffed by local hospital personnel, with support and training from Francis Tombe.



Juba Teaching Hospital Health Information Resource Center

As in Juba, the resource center will help reinforce the staff’s medical training, provide a means for continuing education and professional development and offer free Internet access.

According to Undersecretary of Health Dr. Monywaïr Arop Kuol, the Juba Teaching Hospital Health Information Resource Center “ushers in a new era, an era of Southern Sudan becoming part of the world. The significance of this is actually giving us the ability to acquire information, and of course someone who has given you information has really given you power.”



Dr. Monywaïr Arop Kuol

The Capacity Project, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by IntraHealth International and partners, helps developing countries strengthen human resources for health to better respond to the challenges of implementing and sustaining quality health programs.

The Voices from the Capacity Project series is made possible by the support of the American people through USAID. The contents are the responsibility of IntraHealth International and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.



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