Ottawa and Nairobi hospitals twinned, thanks to EMBA'05 Ottawa Team

While the Toronto-based EMBA'05s destined to become Team Canzania were working on their Global Business Project (GBP), a like-minded group of Ottawa EMBA'05 students decided independently to also focus their project on the non-profit sector in a developing country.

It started with **Dr. Karim Damji, EMBA'05**, an ophthalmologist with The Ottawa Hospital (TOH), who saw an opportunity to use the GBP to accelerate a twinning project he'd already been working on with TOH's Chief of Staff, **Dr. Chris Carruthers**. Hospital twinning enables like-minded institutions in the developed and developing world to exchange knowledge, skills, and services and facilitate ongoing professional development.

Seeing the value of having 'free' consultants work on the project, Chris supported the proposal to have an EMBA team develop a framework for identifying a twinning partner. Karim approached his teammates, **Randy Elias** and **Wendy McCallum**, for help. Inspired by Karim's vision of making a contribution in the non-profit sector, particularly in healthcare, Randy and Wendy eagerly signed on.

Ottawa EMBA'05 team in front of Aga Khan University Hospital in Nairobi, Kenya. From left, Randy Elias, Dr. Karim Damji, and Wendy McCallum.

The team immediately set to work with Chris to build a rationale for twinning and to produce a methodology for choosing a partner within the GBP timeline. "It's fine to have ideas," says Karim, "but you need to structure those ideas in a thoughtful manner, one that lends itself to execution and follow-through." After investigating best practices from other hospitals that had successfully twinned, the team created selection criteria based on such factors as political stability, existing healthcare systems, the presence of internal champions, mutually acceptable goals, commitment to invest human and other resources, and ability to measure outcomes.

In putting together a list of potential partners, the team researched hospitals in Asia, South America and Africa, but focused on Africa, especially after receiving a request from Stephen Lewis, the former UN Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS, to consider the Queen Elizabeth II Hospital (QEH) in Lesotho. It became one of their short-list candidates, along with the Aga Khan University Hospital (AKUH-N) in Nairobi, Kenya.

With their preliminary research complete, there were still important unknowns to investigate, and so Karim, Randy, Wendy, and Chris went to Africa in the spring of 2005. The first stop was Nairobi and the AKUH-N, with its impressive facilities. "The AKUH-N was transitioning to becoming a teaching hospital," says Wendy, "and they have a passionate leadership."

The group then headed to Lesotho, where they found quite a different situation: a hospital challenged by a lack of resources and poor infrastructure. They learned that the AIDS crisis was having a devastating effect on the country, impacting the availability of trained hospital staff to manage the crisis. The capital city was filled with people working hard to address this human catastrophe: UNICEF workers, volunteers from the Clinton Foundation's HIV/AIDS Initiative, and World Health Organization representatives. Doctors sent by the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA) to teach instead started practising frontline medicine.

The team gets a tour of the hospital in Nairobi.

On a nine-hour layover in Amsterdam on their return trip, the team took out their laptops at an airport café and worked on their report, recommending that the Ottawa Hospital twin with its counterpart in Nairobi. "The AKUH-N had the human and financial resources to put into such a project," says Karim, "and they aspire to become a hub of regional excellence with international standards." While the need at QEH was obviously enormous, the twinning initiative could not support the level of aid needed so urgently, and the OHA was already intervening there, providing life-saving antiretroviral therapy.

Upon their return to Ottawa, the team handed in their GBP report to project supervisor **Dr. Douglas Tessier**. They also submitted it to The Ottawa Hospital's board, which subsequently supported twinning in principal with TOH's Nairobi counterpart.

The project has been up and running for the past three years, with TOH endorsing informal relationships on an interdepartmental basis. Doctors Damji and Carruthers have since travelled to Kenya several times to forge partnerships between the two facilities' ophthalmology and orthopaedic groups. They piloted a 'Sandwich' Fellowship model, in which African specialists rotate learning segments between AKUH-N and TOH.

"The first glaucoma subspecialist in Kenya, and likely in all of sub-Saharan Africa, is about to return to Nairobi," Karim says proudly, and an orthopaedic candidate who trained at TOH returned to Nairobi in late May. Fortunately, recent political events in Kenya have not had any long-term negative effects on the partnership.

The Global Business Project has had a lasting impact on the team members. "We encourage other EMBA teams to focus on the non-profit sector," says Wendy. "It was such a fulfilling and worthwhile thing to do." Karim agrees: "I wanted to improve people's health-related quality of life. Our goal was to help people help themselves. And we've definitely started to achieve that."

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Wendy, Chris, Karim and Randy on safari.