Bringing experience and knowledge to the Ebola frontline in Liberia: Honoring Dr. Anne Atai

It was the tiny pin on her jacket that caught my eye.

At a tea break during the Safe Male Circumcision [2] Knowledge Handover meeting held last month in Kampala, I found myself standing next to a senior physician from Jinja Referral Hospital. She was participating in the meeting as part of a team from Jinja’s Safe Male Circumcision program, to learn from other teams in Uganda that had been working on improving the quality of safe male circumcision services.


The physician’s name is Dr. Anne Deborah Atai Omoruto.

As we chatted over tea, she described to me the experience of leading a team of 13 Ugandan health professionals who spent six months in Liberia from July-December 2014 to support and guide their Liberian counterparts with the hard-won expertise developed in Uganda’s various encounters with Ebola since 2000.

“It was really terrible at first—so much death. It was really unbearable” she said. Dr. Atai told me how she had to fight hard at first to get adequate protective equipment for the Ugandans and for their Liberian counterparts.

She was tasked with directing operations at the Bush Road Island Clinic in Monrovia, a private facility that was converted to an Ebola treatment center in July 2014. During the course of her deployment, Dr. Atai and her colleagues trained over 1000 Liberian health workers in Ebola treatment, infection prevention, and universal precautions.

After we spoke, I found plenty on the web about Dr. Atai and her colleagues.

In a WHO article [3] from October 2014, Dr. Atai recounted how progress in treating patients, working side-by-side the Uganda health professionals, led Liberian health workers to become “more confident about their work…with more people surviving they feel empowered and motivated to continue. They are also getting more comfortable working with protective equipment.”

An article [4] in December 2014 in the online Front Page Africa described how grateful Liberian counterparts bid farewell to the Ugandan team led by Dr. Atai and recognized how she in particular “… has been a force, not just in providing the basics to her Liberian peers, but also looking out for their welfare as well, pressing for benefits and other essentials for Liberian health care workers.”

In reflecting on what an honor it was to meet a true public health hero in a chance encounter, I was...
reminded of the power of knowledge and the difference made by those who generously share their expertise and experience.

Dr. Atai’s and her colleagues’ service and sacrifice to stand side by side health workers in Liberia in the fight against Ebola is a story worth repeating.


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