INFRASTRUCTURE FOR HEALTH: EMPOWERING VILLAGE HEALTH TEAMS IN UGANDA

Daniel Mays, B.S.; Advisor: Edward O’Neil, Jr., M.D.
The George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences; Omni Med

[INTRODUCTION]
The Ugandan National Health System, organized by the Ministry of Health, utilizes community health workers which are structured as Village Health Teams (VHTs). These VHTs work in their own communities as educators of healthy lifestyles and conduits of access to medical care. Omni Med, a Boston-based NGO, works with the Ministry of Health to train and mobilize VHTs in the Mukono District.

[VHT Guide to Healthy Homes]

[AIM]
- Understand how VHTs are empowered to improve health
- Educate VHTs in health and medicine
- Mobilize VHTs by providing motivation and oversight
- Understand experiences of VHT-members via focus groups

[METHODS]
- VHT elections - organized with village chairperson
- Training course - topics such as hygiene, malaria prevention, record-keeping and coordination within the broader health system structure
- Focus groups and performance reviews
- Continuing education programs
- Incentive - given to one notably effective VHT by supporting and funding the construction of a protected water source for their village

[RESULTS]
VHT members are dedicated, capable to apply health knowledge and carry responsibilities. They eagerly participate in continuing education and new health initiatives. They are accepted and valued by their communities. Members report barriers to effectiveness in limited transportation, time, and mobile communications. A protected water source was constructed in the village of Mbane, yielding quantifiably cleaner water for the community.

[CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION]
Though preventable morbidity and mortality affect millions worldwide, there is opportunity to mitigate these human rights violations by building infrastructure for health, that is, the systems necessary for hygienic lifestyles and universal access to primary health care. Uganda’s VHT model carried out by Omni Med’s training and mobilization efforts is an effective starting point for building infrastructure for health in underdeveloped rural regions. Though stunted economic and infrastructural development remain the overarching barriers to healthcare access, VHTs are indispensable proponents of health in communities that would be otherwise cut off. It cannot be ignored, however, that VHT programs cannot long exist without new policies for durable incentive, management, and coordination.

[REFERENCES]
The Republic of Uganda Ministry of Health. Health Sector Quality Improvement Framework and Strategic Plan. 2011