



Speech on the occasion of the Opening Ceremony of the East Africa Training and Service Center for Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Digestive Oncology

at Muhimbili National Hospital in Dar es Salaam/Tanzania
30 May 2014

Today, 30 May 2014 is a historic day for gastroenterology in Africa, as we celebrate the official opening of the EAST AFRICA TRAINING AND SERVICE CENTRE FOR GASTROENTEROLOGY, HEPATOLOGY AND DIGESTIVE ONCOLOGY. For the Gastroenterology Foundation, Munich, this is the fourth training centre that we have built on the continent of Africa, together with the respective Government, after Soweto, Rabat and planning Cairo only. Also historic is the visit of His Excellency Vice President of the United Republic of Tanzania Dr. Mohamed Gharib Bilal, His Excellency the Minister of Health and Social Welfare of the United Republic of Tanzania Dr. Kebwe Kebwe. A cordial welcome is also given to the Excellencies Ambassadors of the Republic of Egypt Dr Hassan Moharum, Dr. Yasur Mohamed Ali, Sudan and the Charge d' Affaires of the Federal Republic of Germany Mr Hans Koepfel.





As the Chairman of the Gastroenterology Foundation, I would like to thank those individuals here present, who have done so much to ensure the successful completion of the project. A phenomenal donation by the Else Kröner-Fresenius-Foundation meant that we were able to purchase a complete set of endoscopy equipment. Professor Dr. Konrad Meßmer, a member of the Foundation's Scientific Board is with us here today. He played a decisive part in ensuring that we were awarded this donation. The Gastroenterology Foundation has also been able to provide other major tools like an ultrasound and X-Ray equipment. Grants were also made available for doctors from Muhimbili National Hospital, to allow them to attend international congresses, as well as for, mostly European, academics to take part in Master's degree courses and for endoscopic consumables. Muhimbili National Hospital has agreed to cover the costs of building a training centre on top of the Paediatric Complex. Heartfelt thanks also go to the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Pallangyo and his successor Professor Kaaya from MUHAS, the Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences, the Executive Director of Muhimbili National Hospital Professor Lema and his particularly dynamic successor, Dr. Marina Njelekela. Marina has provided help and assistance in many tricky and complex situations. I would also like to acknowledge here the contribution of Professor Twalib Ngoma Director of the Ocean Road Cancer Institute. Thanks also go to the architects, Dr. Moses Mkony and Gaudance Aksante, as well as to Dr. Dirk Hagen from GF Munich, who so expertly designed the endoscopy unit.



The gastroenterology centre is now exactly where it belongs: at the centre of the largest teaching hospital in Tanzania. Many inhabitants of this country suffer from disorders of the digestive tract and the liver (particularly malignant tumours), yet there is a lack of medical experts, gastroenterologists, now also named as visceral physicians. The reason for this being the lack of opportunities in academic training in this discipline. Two years ago, MUHAS allowed us to introduce a two-year MSc course in gastroenterology. In the Autumn of this year, five internal specialists/surgeons with successfully complete their studies after passing their final examination. Nine gastroenterology lecturers from Europe and North Africa made a massive contribution to the course's success: these are Rudolf Arnold (Germany), Professor Volker Diehl (Germany), Professor Gullini (Italy), Professor Abdel Meguid Kassem (Egypt), Professor Gaetano Laquinto (Italy), Professor Reinhold Stockbrügger (Italy), Dr. Hans-Holger v. Plato (Germany) and Professor Filip Zavada (Czech Republic) and PD Dr. Matthias Breidert (Germany). I thank them and those who were unable to be here today with all my heart.



Muhimbili National Hospital now has the equipment to provide special care for those countless patients suffering from gastroenterological disorders, plus an academic facility for training doctors, as well as, soon, for nursing staff. However, we cannot rest on our laurels. A modern centre of reference for gastroenterology/visceral medicine has to have an OPD, a part of the ICU and a ward specifically for gastrointestinal and liver disorders, if possible, together with the visceral surgeons. Wherever possible, patients on wards should be visited jointly and there should also be a close collaboration with the oncologists. I have always wanted to have Professor Ngoma as our partner. In my former workplace in Munich there was a joint tumour board every morning at 7.30 h. We called it the GE oncological Morning Prayer with the afore-mentioned medical disciplines, also attended by pathologists, radiologists, radiotherapists and assigning doctors.



By founding this training centre, we have reached some well-defined humanitarian goals, but we do not want to lose sight of scientific missions. Tanzania also needs first class researchers in our speciality. As an example previously, the intestines and, in particular, their contents were largely ignored, and were only talked about in the crudest terms. Nowadays, we know better. Healthy intestines contain about 1000 types of bacteria, the microbiome of sick intestines could not only be responsible for metabolic and inflammatory diseases of the bowel, but also for memory, mental efforts and psychiatric illnesses. Several including neurogastroenterological indications for stool transplants from healthy to sick patients are continuously increasing. Who knows? Perhaps one of our alumni will achieve worldwide fame as an academic researcher in this area of expertise.

We have still not quite reached the apex, the highest the point of medical research. Only when we try our hardest, will we achieve this and make progress in terms of reaching the scientific level of Oxford, Berkeley and Berlin. The beneficiaries of this progress would be the Tanzanian patients and anyone who has now to be taken to Europe or India for a liver transplantation or other interventions.

In the future, we want to treat these and other critical illnesses of the tract and liver here in the magnificent Muhimbili National Hospital.

Thanks you for your attention.

Prof. Meinhard Classen, Munich

