

## Winter 2022 Report, Insight & Update for our donors and supporters



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*The Virtual Doctors is the UK's leading primary health care International Telemedicine Charity and the largest charitable telemedicine provider in Zambia. Following a small pilot, we are about to expand our service across Malawi. The organisation's principal aim is to improve primary healthcare and prevent unnecessary referrals to hospitals. Using a Smartphone App, the service connects isolated health centres in rural Zambia with volunteer doctors, based predominantly in the UK.*



## Executive Summary

### 2022

2022 has been a busy year for the Virtual Doctors and ended, after a review of the Impact Report from our 6 pilot sites, with our expansion project being approved by the Malawi Ministry of Health.

We began the year with our visionary Founder, Huw Jones, stepping down from operations and taking up the role of President of our charity. James Phiri, who worked with Huw in progressive roles as a volunteer, UK Trustee and Chair of the Zambia Board, now leads operations as CEO.

In anticipation of a busy 2023, the Zambia team has been strengthened with two new joiners and the excellent Stellah Chilemba continues to lead the team on the ground in Lusaka as our Operations Supervisor.

### MALAWI

Our Malawi expansion project was driven by our objective to be an effective partner to the Malawi Ministry of Health, in line with our vision to have a service that was fully embedded in the local health care system. Aside from the delays associated with Covid-19, we also needed the endorsement of the MoH Technical Working Group before being approved by the Technical Senior Management Team. The demands on the MoH from their various stakeholders and partners was such that we struggled to keep to our original timeline. The MoH officials assigned to us worked tirelessly to enable us to present to both Teams and gain the necessary approval, which was granted in October. We are now working with the MoH Planning Department to implement the project and onboard 50 new sites onto our service. 2023 presents us with an opportunity to significantly accelerate our progress in Malawi.

### VIRTUAL DOCTORS NEW APP

As reported last year, we secured funding from Johnson and Johnson for developing a new app for our service. Over the last year, we have been very busy, consulting widely with all our stakeholders to develop a 'state of the art' set of technical specifications and we are now in the last stages of vendor selection. The new software will transform the agility of our service provision as well as our capacity for scaling our service into new geographies and adapting to the local needs for case escalation. We are also actively working on expanding our medical resource library for our Clinical Officers.

### ZAMBIA

We have continued to expand our footprint in Zambia, serving an additional 40 new rural clinics during 2023 including Chama, in the Eastern province, making a total of 275 registered users. Some of the earlier devices will need to be retired and replaced as they are beginning to struggle with age and the latest Android software updates.

Chama is of particular significance as this was where the Virtual Doctors vision began, with Huw Jones trying to help a pregnant lady whose husband was trying to transport her on his bicycle to the nearest hospital. Unfortunately, it was too far away, and she sadly passed away in Huw's vehicle.



## PARTNERS

To realise our objectives for enhanced service provision across a larger geography, we have been working to find partners who have complementary services and experience to our own and who can help us advance our vision of supporting health workers with case diagnosis and reducing long distance hospital referrals for patients. We are currently working with Starfish Malawi, OnCall Africa and PFP, all of whom have strong and effective presences in Malawi, Zambia and Kenya respectively. Significantly, we have also been accepted as partners on the Geeks Without Frontiers led N50 project, which seeks to bring together organisations that can help deliver internet broadband connectivity to the next 50% of the world population and through that enhance access to better services including healthcare and education. We hope to work with these and other like-minded partners as we continue to find ways of supporting the enhanced provision of healthcare to rural communities.

## YOUR SUPPORT

We are looking forward to continuing to work on your behalf in 2023 and we thank you for your continuing support - **we couldn't achieve what we do without your support.**

Wishing you a happy and healthy 2023!

James Phiri  
CEO, the Virtual Doctors









## Introduction

Firstly, we would like to thank all our volunteer doctors, donors and supporters for your continued dedication to improving healthcare services in the communities supported by the Virtual Doctors service as well as the new areas we will now be able to support in Malawi. Your efforts are invaluable, and we truly appreciate your continued support in connecting our volunteer doctors to Clinical officers in rural areas.

During 2022, we have received support from 48 individuals who joined the 1000 Club, a group of people who have committed to supporting the Virtual Doctors service over a five-year period. This was started by one of Trustees, who continues to recruit additional people to join the 'club'. We have also continued to receive support from many individual members who make regular monthly contributions as well as Trusts and Foundations who have supported our expansion plans for Malawi. Your patience while we negotiated the approval process for expansion and the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic has enabled us to reach a new milestone in Malawi.

We would also like to thank our community of Clinical Officers, their management, the officials who have supported us from the Ministries of Health in Zambia and Malawi, and our partners.

Your efforts, commitment and dedication to improving the lives of others continue to inspire us to make a small contribution to supporting the healthcare services that our Clinical Officers provide to their patients and communities they serve.

## Update on our Operations

### Malawi Expansion

Our Malawi expansion was delayed by the Covid-19 challenges as well as difficulties in obtaining the authorisations we needed to proceed from the Ministry of Health. For obvious reasons, the new government has had quite a busy period and it took longer than we had anticipated to have the meetings and endorsements we needed from the MoH Health Technical Working Group (TWG) and finally, the MoH senior Management Technical team (SMT).

We finally had the opportunity to present our expansion plans to the TWG, who endorsed the plans and recommended a final review by the SMT. We were then invited to present to the SMT in November 2022. We are pleased to report that we now have full endorsement from the SMT to proceed and we are liaising with the planning department on the implementation activities, including identifying sites and ensuring that we are working effectively with local doctors as we onboard new clinics onto the Virtual Doctors service.

We appreciate that this has been a long road and we are very grateful for your patience and understanding as we worked through these important stages. We are now in a position where we can work alongside the Ministry of Health, supporting their capacity building strategy and being led by local priority considerations.



Over the next 3 years we aim to rollout our service to each of the 28 districts in Malawi, this will support Ministry of Health's efforts to provide universal access to health care and achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 3 - Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages.

During 2023, we aim to expand our service into 50 new sites providing access to quality health care.

### **Malawi Long Bone Fracture Program**

We are also pleased to report that we have been invited to join the Long Bone Fracture Program in Malawi, helping to facilitate knowledge sharing and access to expertise for health workers who are treating orthopaedic conditions. We will be working alongside KidsOR, Lifebox, the World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists, the University of North Carolina and representatives of the Ministry of Health of Malawi.

We attended the launch of this Program in Lilongwe during September 2022 and the day included representatives from all the Districts Medical Offices. This is the community our service will support as we roll out our service to more clinics. Also in attendance was Dr Queen Dube, Chief of Clinical Services at the MoH.

The program is supported by Johnson & Johnson and will commence with upgrading the central hospitals in the first phase, including enhancing the availability of equipment and improving expertise.

*"With its integrated approach and systems-based potential, the program will be a game changer for injured Malawians,"*

Maria Glebova, Global Surgery Franchise Lead, Global Public Health, Johnson & Johnson.

## Zambia Expansion

We continue to support 275 Clinical Officers in Zambia!

During 2022 we expanded to 40 new sites in 6 Districts and 4 provinces. The districts we have expanded to are Gwembe, Chama, Kazungula, Kaputa, and Sesheke. The new Districts have recorded over 238 cases across 17 different specialties.

### *Kaputa District*

Kaputa District is in the Northern Province.

Training was conducted by the Kaputa district CCO Mr Mwanakalando as well as a member of the VDRs Team. The seven Clinicians from different facilities met at the District Health Office to receive the App training and collect devices. The Clinicians thanked the Virtual Doctors for extending the service to the district and are looking forward to utilising the service.



### *Chama District*

Chama District is the largest district in the Muchinga Province in Zambia and the population has close links to the people of Malawi, with whom they share historical, tribal and cultural links. This is the first time the Virtual Doctors service has been introduced in the district and we are looking forward to the full utilisation of the service as we strive to support the great efforts of Zambia's dedicated clinical officers.

The Virtual Doctors team trained six clinicians from different sites including, his Royal Highness Chief Tembwe, who is also a medical practitioner. They welcomed the opportunity to connect with different medical specialists based in the UK through the Virtual Doctors App.





We are particularly excited to be in Chama because this is the area where the Virtual Doctors story started when our founder and now President, Huw Jones, witnessed the death of a mother who could have benefited from her clinic having access to the medical expertise that is now available through our service.

Stephen Muyambango – Chama

*“the Virtual Doctors has lifted burdens of transfers from one level to another level of care through their App which has also helped our patients with less financial stress”*

### *Kazungula District*

Kazungula District is a small border town lying on the north bank of the Zambezi River about 70 kilometres west of Livingstone in Zambia.

The team activated four sites namely, Nyawa Clinic, Nkuni Clinic, Kapatizya Clinic and Kazungula Hospital.

The Virtual Doctors team members trained four Clinicians on how to use the Virtual Doctors service.



Mr. Ian Nanzaluka - Kazungula District

*“Before I joined the Virtual Doctors, I did not know how to handle cases hence I would make referrals even when it was not necessary because I was unsure of how to handle some cases. Through the Virtual Doctors easy to use App, I can consult and gain answers on how to handle complex cases”*

### *Gwembe District*

The VDr's service was initially introduced in Gwembe District at Luumbo Health Facility in February 2022 as a pilot project in partnership with N50, where five Clinicians were signed up using one device. The use of the service at Luumbo Health facility prompted us to expand the service to other facilities within the district.

Our team visited Lukonde Clinic, one of the newly activated Virtual Doctors sites in the district. The clinic is located approximately 27 kilometres from the District Health Office. The team were welcomed by Sister Duma (one of the nurses) at the facility, who showed them around the facility, including the Mother and Child Health (MCH) wing, where they interacted with some admitted patients.



## Orton Chifumpu – Gwembe District

*“Since I joined the Virtual Doctors, it has made my role easier as a rural front-line health worker because medical advice is given within 24 hours, hence referrals are reduced, and I have learnt different ways of managing complex cases”*

## Sesheke District

Working in partnership with OnCall Africa, the VDr's expanded has been activated in 13 new facilities, one for Zimba district Southern Province and twelve from Sesheke district Western province.

Sesheke District is a border town in Western Province of Zambia which is about 200km away from Livingstone, lying on the northern bank of the Zambezi River which forms the border with Namibia's Caprivi Strip. The district has an estimated population of around 100,000 people.



The Clinical Care Officer and the On Call Africa team were part of the training. They all encouraged the participants to embrace the Virtual Doctors' service and incorporate it in their already existing standard operating procedures. They highlighted that the Virtual Doctors' Service will enhance and broaden their healthcare skills which will support the reduction of the high numbers of referrals experienced in the district. The CCO emphasized the need to embrace technology as the medical field demands continuous learning to maintain and improve standards of health care.



## A superb team effort...

Our team on the ground is led by our Operations Supervisor, Stellah Chilembo, who this year has also been joined by Wilson Mooba (Clinical care service and communications officer), Penelope Chileshe (Clinical liaison officer) and Agness Kabosha as an intern. Together they have enabled us to successfully expand to new sites and to manage and prepare for the crucial work in Malawi that will commence in early 2023. We have also strengthened the team in preparation for the Tech enhancement project that will require active engagement with all our Clinical officers to support the deployment of a new app later in 2023. In the UK we have Sophie Miller as our Finance and communications officer, responsible for office administration, liaising with our donor and supporter community and supporting our Trustees and Zambia team.

## Fundraising

### *Royal Parks Half Marathon*

The Royal Parks Half Marathon event took place on Sunday the 9th of October. Our team went along to show support and gratitude to the runners taking part and raising money for charity.

A massive thank you to Matthew Cartwright-Terry who took part in the race, raising £768 towards the Virtual Doctors activities! We are so grateful to you for your support and efforts.

The Royal Parks Half Marathon will take place again in October 2023, if you would like to sign up to run for the Virtual Doctors or would like more information, please get in touch with our administrator via [info@virtualdoctors.org](mailto:info@virtualdoctors.org).



### *The Bursary Scheme*

We started a bursary scheme in honour of the memory of a much-missed colleague, Pelekelo Kabulubula, who tragically and suddenly passed away in 2018. The aim is to ensure that Pelekelo's legacy will enable some of his fellow Clinical Officers to expand their professional development and ultimately support the improvement of patient care in Zambia.

A JustGiving page was set up by the Virtual Doctors team and now holds enough funds for us to start a Clinical Officer on their new learning journey. Our team in Zambia set up a competition that is open for all our current COs to enter. The winner will be announced in January on our social media pages.

To donate to this project, click the link below or search "Pelekelo Kabulubulu" on the JustGiving home page. [Clinical Officer Bursary Fund in memory of Pelekelo Kabulubulu - JustGiving](#)





## Tech update

Over the last year, our team has been diligently working towards launching the project for developing a new Virtual Doctors App to further enhance our ability to strengthen our service and support a greater number of users as we scale up the service. The funding was provided under the Johnson and Johnson grant. We are now in the last stages of vendor selection for this project, and we aim to have the new App ready for deployment during 2023.

## Partnerships

### *On Call Africa*

We have expanded to Sesheke District in partnership with OnCall Africa and we hope to expand to more areas where they are active on the ground. OnCall Africa 'addresses the root causes of poor access to, and quality of healthcare and strengthens community led programmes that are vital for remote rural communities. We are looking forward to supporting more Clinical Officers in areas where OnCall Africa is already busy with capacity building for community health workers.

Find out more here: [Overview - On Call Africa](#)

### *Starfish Malawi*

the Virtual Doctors service has been implemented in Malawi's Salima District under a Partnership with Starfish Malawi and we plan to have joint fundraising events in the future.

Starfish Malawi, via Hope Clinic, have a direct Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Health and have strong links with the Salima District Medical Officer to whom we have been introduced. He is very keen to be first in line for full VDRs coverage of a district.

In July we met with the Senior CO, Emmanuel, who will manage the VDRs device. We are looking forward to working closely with their team.

[About Us — Starfish Malawi](#)

### *N50*

The Virtual Doctors have been a supporter on the N50 project from its inception and has recently been accepted as a full partner, enabling us to participate in future projects and collaborate with other like-minded teams. Our Luumbo site in Gwembe District started as a pilot site in collaboration with N50.

N50 describe their vision as '*Enabling the next 3 billion people to participate in the digital world. The N50 Project accelerates digital adoption and community enrichment through innovative applications, network design, and business models to enable the next 3 billion people to participate*

*in the digital world. Broadband adoption will be accelerated and sustained, globally, through commercial, non-profit, government, and community partnerships.'*

Given that our own mission has always been to support health workers in remote areas, there is a natural synergy with the N50 project, and we hope we can leverage their expertise in improving our reach into areas that cannot currently access reliable connectivity. This is a long-term project, and we are proud to be part of it.

[Find out more about the N50 project....](#)

## Other Activities

### *Volunteer Expo– Birmingham*

the Virtual Doctors joined the Volunteer Expo event in Birmingham in May! Volunteer Expo Live aims to about connect volunteering communities and bring together a cross section of society under one roof. With many third sector organisations participating this is the perfect place to network and collaborate, helping us to build on brand awareness as we communicate our values and goals. It also enables us to see what other similar organisations are doing as well as connect with new potential supporters and volunteers. We managed to recruit a few volunteers to join our team of Volunteers, including a doctor!



### *Health Care Show & Tell Returns*

The Healthcare Show & Tell is a space to engage, showcase, encourage and provide a platform for front-line staff to interact and share their knowledge with each other as well as get feedback from peers and specialists from the UK Volunteer Doctors. We supply the Clinical Officers with data to access the Zoom meetings and for those who have poor connectivity we also provide for transport costs to the District Office or another location where they can join the meeting with better connectivity.

Episode 15 was presented by Sharon Nyirenda, from Kabengenshi Health Post, Mukushi District. Presenting a case of a woman in labour with high blood pressure.

Episode 16 featured Akende Wina, from Kalomo Hospital, Kalomo District. They presented a maternal case study on a woman who had given birth recently and was suffering from shortness of breath and swelling of the body.

Episode 17 featured Victor Mulenga, from Zambian Helpers' Society Clinic, in Chilanga district. His case presentation was about a 6-year-old child who was diagnosed with sickle cell disease.

Episode 18 was presented by Hope Chama from one of our newly opened sites in Gwembe district, Sinafala Health Facility. The case under discussion was that of a one-year girl who was brought to with complaints of sores.

A huge thank you to everyone who supported and participated in the shows this year, your involvement in health matters means a lot to us. The funding, time, commitment and effort you invest into improving health care and case management in these communities is invaluable.

#### *Dr Hannaa Travels to Zambia*

Dr Hannaa is an ophthalmologist, and she is one of our volunteer doctors. In July 2022 she visited Momboshi Health Post in Chisamba District with our Zambia team.

It was also the first field trip for our two new staff members, Penelope and Wilson, since they joined the Virtual Doctors, an opportunity for them to directly see the App in operation. Momboshi Health Post signed up to the Virtual Doctors platform in March 2020 and currently has a total of four staff with two clinicians consulting on the Virtual Doctors App.

Dr Hannaa toured the departments - Maternal Child Health, Outpatient Department and the Maternity Ward – and she gained a deeper understanding of the challenges faced at the facility and how the Virtual Doctors App is addressing some of these challenges. We would like to thank Dr Hannaa Bobat, for the service she provides on the Virtual Doctors platform and for making this effort to visit the clinic in Zambia.

