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flowers in hospital

To all my friends and supporters



On **February 24th** I bought a ukulele and a book to teach myself.

On **February 25th** I woke up vomiting blood and was taken by ambulance to Emergency at Northern Beaches hospital.

On **February 27th** I didn't board the plane to return to Tanzania as planned, and in fact didn't board the postponed flight I had made for March 19th. Now I have a return flight ticket which is valid till January 2021. But whether I will be able to use it is yet to be seen.



When I last wrote to you on January 24th I was in Mwanza on my way to Australia for my yearly visit for routine medical tests. As you can see from the above, they soon became "not routine" and much more serious.

Some of you will have already had updates from Anglican Aid who have been a great support to me through this time and sent out emails to those on their list of supporters of Bunda Girls Secondary School (BGSS) and Shalom Pre and Primary School (SPPS). The rest of you may have been wondering where I am and what has been happening. Now that I am well on the road to recovery I am finally able to update you all and also to let you know news from Tanzania, where I long to be, and am waiting for the right time to rejoin my brothers and sisters there.

Routine medical tests soon took a serious turn.

Routine medical tests began very well, with excellent results and the all clear. But as well as routine tests, I also needed to investigate the persistent amoeba which had been diagnosed in Tanzania as the cause of 3 months of diarrhea and 12 kg weight loss but which had not responded to two courses of treatment.

February 17th I had a colonoscopy which is when the not so routine began to be flagged.

February 18th a CT scan revealed a tumor on my pancreas and this was the first day the word Cancer was suggested to be the possible diagnosis.

More tests followed and it was while I was waiting for a further test that I vomited blood on

February 25th and from then tests and procedures accelerated.

February 29th I was transferred to Royal North Shore Hospital. More tests in preparation for surgery.

March 3rd at 9 pm it was decided that all tests supported that the cancer had not spread anywhere else in my body and that I was fit and strong enough to undergo major surgery the next day.

March 4th – 10 hours in the operating theatre for “Whipple Procedure surgery”. This is a major surgery where the tumor, the head of the pancreas, the gall bladder, part of the stomach, part of the bile duct are all removed, and what is left is then reconnected resulting in a new digestive system. After a few days in ICU and then transferred to the ward I was finally discharged.



March 17th – Home to my town house at Mona Vale where I am recovering well and adjusting to my new rather reduced in size digestive system. This means eating small amounts more often and taking enzyme tablets whenever I eat to help my poor little pancreas do its work. It was a lot more comfortable once all the staples were removed from my stomach and the rather dramatic wound is healing beautifully. Follow up consultations have all been very encouraging.

The cancer was completely contained in the tumor and had not spread anywhere else. Indications are that I won't need chemotherapy but this will be confirmed on April 29th. One outcome of this surgery can often be diabetes and initial blood tests indicate this may be the case and is still being monitored. Next follow up is CT scan and blood tests in 3 months time.

Thanks to God and my friends and family and the medical teams

I am thankful to God for his miraculous care and the people he used to support me and encourage me through this difficult time. If you read about pancreatic cancer and Whipple procedure surgery the outcomes are often quite bleak, but God has cleared the path for me at each step, with early detection (thanks to the amoeba diagnosis which started the investigations) with the best possible outcome and no complications and I'm looking forward to resuming my normal life, even if in some respects it will be a “new” normal. In the more difficult and stressful moments I'm grateful to all those who came to visit me in hospital and for the prayers of so many people both here and in Tanzania. My sister Georgina and her husband Lloyd have been, and still are, amazing in their care



and support. One morning after the worst night ever I rang them at 5.30 am and asked them to come and hold my hand. At 6.30 am they somehow got into the ward and stayed with me for a couple of hours when I really needed that comfort.

I went into hospital as a public patient but at each step of the way had top surgeons and medical teams who have been honest and realistic and encouraging at the same time.

Praying together with a group of visitors

The timing of my admission and discharge from hospital meant that I was safely home before the covid19 situation escalated and lockdowns and stay at home isolation came into force. Georgina and Lloyd are in their town house here in Mona Vale which is next door to mine and we have a connecting door. So the three of us are on strict isolation lockdown with their children and grandchildren doing our shopping.

As my strength has increased I am enjoying going for walks in the sunshine. After two weeks I graduated from the walker to walking unaided.



With no more medical tests or appointments which need to be face to face, we are planning to go to Georgina and Lloyd's farm near Bathurst to continue our isolation in the fresh country air. Church services on You Tube, Zoom meetings and also phone calls mean that the fellowship and support of our local church and other friends, can continue wherever I am.

News from Tanzania

I came to Australia expecting to be back in Bunda after one month. Now a return date is impossible to plan. This is not only because of my surgery and recovery but because of the worldwide covid19 pandemic. I'm thankful that I was here before that hit us all and that I was here for this emergency medical treatment. But it's hard to be so abruptly separated from life and ministry and friends in Bunda with no idea how the future will unfold. **Covid19 began slowly in Tanzania but the rate of increase has escalated in the last couple of days.**

March 16th – 1 case, March 20th – 2 cases, March 28th – 13 cases, April 5th – 18 cases, April 11th – 24 cases, April 14th – 43 cases, April 16th – 94 cases, April 17th – 147 cases. (figures are cumulative totals) So far 5 deaths have been recorded. The main area affected so far is Dar es Salaam but also cases in Arusha and now reported in Mwanza (which is the just 2 hours drive from Bunda and there is always a lot of people traveling to and fro).

Schools and institutions have all been closed down for one month now and the closure is continuing. Churches and mosques are encouraged to meet as the President has said we need God to help us through this. There are no lockdown orders at present, but definitely a lot of publicity and encouragement to wash hands and try to keep a safe distance from each other. The President has announced there will be **three days of National Prayer from Friday 17th to Sunday 19th April** to Help Defeat the Coronavirus. Two national public holidays have been cancelled and the government funds for celebrations redirected to protection from Covid19.

I am in touch with my friends and colleagues at home in Bunda, at BGSS and SPPS, at the GB Centre and the Diocese in Musoma. With schools closed it impacts everyone – students, parents, staff and the whole community. They don't have the luxury of on-line learning, and the centres will also all struggle financially. They are all doing what they can to keep safe. So please pray earnestly for **Bishop George, for Deninsia** (headmistress of BGSS) and the staff, for **Apasaria** (headmistress of SPPS) and the staff, for **Noadia and Christina and our Accountant Nickson** and the rest of the GB Centre team, for **Rebeka and Rejina** and the rest of the team at my Strawberry Pink Villa, and for all the students at home and their families.

Meantime

I continue to adjust to this strange situation we are all living in, always praying for God to intervene, for Christians to remain faithful and to be a light for Jesus, as I wait for God's timing to allow me to rejoin my friends and colleagues in Bunda. I am also thankful for the gift of time with Georgina and Lloyd and time to recover and to be quiet.

Praying for you as your life is also impacted, that you will have peace and strength in the coming days

With love and prayers from Helen



The view from my bedroom window at the farm.

