



It seems like only a few months ago we were sending our newsletter, and here we are again with more news to share! I have recently returned from three and a half months in Senegal volunteering with Mercy Ships. It was an interesting experience and good to be in another African country. I was reminded once again how times are hard for Malawi. The exchange rates between the XOF and Kwacha are similar. Chitenje and taxi's within Dakar are lower to their Lilongwe counterparts, average wages are higher, healthcare availability (at least in the cities) is more accessible. I was told students in Senegal do not need to pay tuition fees or accommodation whilst they are studying, all being fully subsidized by the government. I'm reminded that the need for students in Malawi is genuine and at times desperate and there is always more work to do. We entered our tenth anniversary year as an independent organization in November! Thank you to everyone who came to our online event celebrating this milestone. For those that missed it, you can take a listen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eiaDVeU3jAs&t=7s> We hope that this is the start of more virtual events, where we can share the stories from students past and present to demonstrate the very real role Medic to Medic plays in their journey. The new year holds more projects for Medic to Medic. Whatever your plans for Christmas, we hope you have a Merry one!

*Tamsin*

## Walani – A student support helpline in Malawi

Over the last 12 months we have noticed many of our students are stressed, overwhelmed and mentally withdrawn. We have concerns for their mental well-being. Mental health problems are on the rise throughout the world but are already notably higher in Africa where there are fewer support services available, and widespread social challenges related to poverty.

Trainee health workers are exposed to physical and emotional trauma and deal with the impact of death and dying during their training, at a time when they do not yet have the skills to manage complex conditions and patient interactions. They are vulnerable to burn out, which exacerbates existing stressors related to sourcing tuition fees, accommodation and food and may help explain why mental health problems are higher in this vocational group.

A 2019 study from Cape Town showed almost 25% of medical students reported levels of depression, significantly higher than age-based expectations. It was recommended that there should be multidisciplinary efforts targeting initiatives to strengthen well-being and resilience in future health care professionals.

There is no existing research to show the levels of depression in trainee health workers in Malawi. In March 2022 we conducted a survey of our student community, asking the validated Patient Health Questionnaire 9 (PHQ9) depression survey. 94% of respondents had been overwhelmed in their studies with 60% of students having mild – moderately severe depression. If extrapolated, these rates are likely to be an underestimate to the student community in Malawi given students on scholarships do not have the same degree of financial burden as others.

Our survey demonstrates an overwhelming need to provide additional psychosocial supports to students throughout Malawi. During 2023 we plan to set up a confidential, toll-free helpline for students to access counselling services. The helpline will be staffed by counsellors and mental health workers, providing employment in Malawi. It will not take over existing psychosocial supports available at university, but rather compliment existing services. Results from our survey showed 100% of student respondents felt a helpline would be acceptable and all stated they would recommend such a service to their friend. 100% of faculty members from 10 universities and colleges in Malawi felt that a student helpline was acceptable and 100% would recommend it to their students.

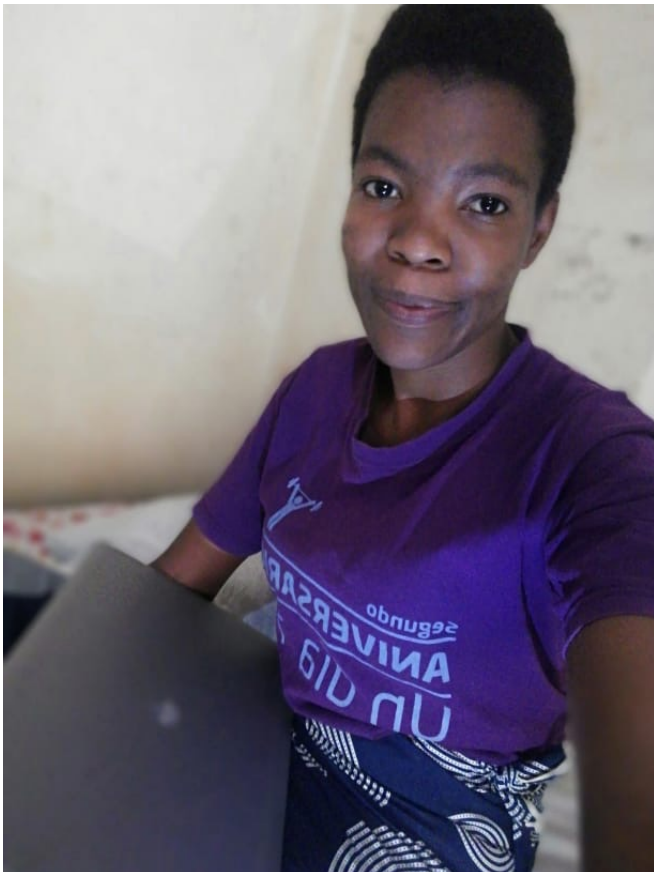
Would you like to support us in this initiative? Take a look at our crowdfunding page: <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/walani-a-student-helpline-in-malawi>

## A hard lump to swallow

Being a student can almost make one go crazy, let alone being a health profession student. The pressure, stress, fear and not knowing what's coming next is a torture on its own. Yet there are many beautiful moments in the journey, unforgettable events and memories that one carries for the rest of the life, mine is such a journey.

Since I got a scholarship with Medic to Medic a few months ago, some things have become easier. Before getting the scholarship I had a huge fees balance and my parents couldn't in any way be able to pay for it. It gave me a lot of stress, pressure and fear. It affected almost all the angles of my life. Now with the scholarship I have been able to access my academic results that I couldn't access for at least 3 semesters, it wasn't easy holding on and it was hard keeping the tears back during all that time. Now knowing that I passed in all the courses and semesters has given me great confidence and courage to continue working hard and I have the motivation to work even harder. It's a nice feeling and I am so grateful for that. I don't carry around the burden I used to carry everywhere for more than two years, I feel lighter. As for now I can confidently and comfortably look forward to the future, while working hard for a better one.

I am in my final year of study now, and final year is all about midwifery. It's a great discovery for me that midwifery is so exciting and exhilarating to learn. The experience is



beautiful and amazing. I can't fully express or explain the joy of witnessing a human being coming into the world, brand new and innocent. It's such a joy for me, I always feel like dancing when I hear the baby cry for the very first time, and that cry is so precious. I am so eager to learn more, for the few weeks that I have been a midwifery student I have already observed a vacuum extraction delivery, a breech presentation, twin delivery, pre-term birth and countless spontaneous vertex deliveries.

The day I witnessed the twin delivery was both my happiest and saddest day in the labor ward. I arrived there early in the morning so that I could greet and have a little chat with my patients before my shift starts, and I found the labour ward night staff so busy conducting deliveries. When I heard that there was a breech presentation, I got so enthusiastic to observe and learn, I got closer since it would be my first time. It was breech presentation and twins! The first baby, a female infant came out with the feet first at around 07:40 am with an Apgar score of 9/10 then 10/10 weighing 1500g, that's also when I understood that they were preterm babies, 7 months' gestation. The second one was a cephalic presentation, a male infant born 10 minutes later with an Apgar score of 8/10 then 9/10 weighing 1300 grams. I danced at the birth of twins, so tiny yet adorable and my heart went out to them. And referral to a bigger hospital was to be made since we couldn't keep or help them survive with the little materials that we have in a rural hospital, even oxygen therapy was impossible since there was black out. The ambulance was not available; the tiny baby boy could not hold on any longer, he passed away a few hours later after his birth. My heart broke. As I watched his mother crying for him, I just sat there speechless and not knowing what to do, I couldn't find any words that could comfort or console her aching body and heart. She was moving from one pain to another. She was trying giving all the attention, care and love to the remaining little one, her hope. Kangaroo Mother Care had been initiated and she was doing all she could and trying her best to do everything right.

In times like this, reality bites, we live, learn and work in an environment, where many times lives are lost because of simple issues like electricity blackouts, inadequate oxygen machines or cylinders, here a life can be lost because an ambulance is busy elsewhere, I wonder how many people care, who cares? These are lives on those who have the same background as mine, who can't afford a private or an expensive hospital,

**Takondwa Likumbo**

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people who are poor. It is a hard lump to swallow but it has to be swallowed anyway. These situations give me hunger to improve and be the best in order to give these kinds of people the best care they need. It's hard to work in these kinds of environment but somebody has to be there for them. It reminds me of the day when a woman in labour held onto me tightly, constantly telling me not to go or leave her when she heard that my shift was over and I was knocking off. It was late, my shift long gone but she could not let me go. As her contractions got stronger she could grab even tighter. It was also one of those times of blackouts, I was holding a small torch in one hand and supporting her with the other, in my mind were thoughts about her pain, electricity, the coming baby and how best I can help her. When she gave birth to a baby boy almost 2 hours later, we were both exhausted and happy for the new little one.

It is obvious that as one gets higher with studies, studying also gets tougher but I never really expected final year to give me a hard time. As for me, the final year itself isn't really a bother. Having passed in all the previous semesters and being done with the nursing part now midwifery could have been the only fight I should have been trying to win but here comes a research project. The project has just started and there is a very long way to go, I hope that the journey will be enjoyable and profitable and that the experience will teach me a lot of things. I am so very happy for the laptop that I have received recently from Medic to Medic, it will make a lot of things especially this project so much easier than it was before, using a small phone for such a big project is very challenging, it proves to be hard and sometimes impossible. It was hard but the presence of the laptop will completely turn things around. I am so proud and happy since this student update is the first project and document to be typed and edited on this new laptop.

**Takondwa Likumbo****Keep Updated!**

Follow our blog to keep updated with our latest news and activities:

<https://healthprofessionalmalawi.wordpress.com/>



**Listen to our Podcasts!**  
On Spotify: "Malawi Matters"  
<https://anchor.fm/medic-to-medic>



**Since our last newsletter:**

**15** new students supported

**9** Graduations

Distributed **18** laptops

**Golf Day in May**

We're planning a fundraising golf day in Buckinghamshire in May – interested?

Get in touch!

[info@medictomedic.org.uk](mailto:info@medictomedic.org.uk)

**Environmental Initiatives**

In January 2022, Medic to Medic embarked on an environmental action initiative. We asked our students who would like to get involved in tree planting initiatives within their local communities. Several students came forward with project proposals. They were asked to identify an area for reforestation within their local communities; discuss these projects with the villagers and village chief / headman; they were then asked to cost the project – given a minimum of 50 trees and submit their budgets. Students could discuss the project with the chief as to what type of trees were needed and identify these on their project proposals.

These projects enable us to work with our students on a shared initiative, with students developing leadership roles at a community level – ensuring that the forests are community owned and supported. If the process goes well, we will be able to invite the students once graduated on to a more formal role within Medic to Medic in Malawi – such as fundraising, advocacy or mentorship, ensuring the sustainability of our community.

These projects have been so successful that we formed an *Environmental Action* WhatsApp groups for students to share knowledge and ideas and elected a subcommittee with our own logo for the group and run our own *Environmental Action* Facebook page. Students were required to write a short report, fill out an online survey at 6 months post planting and visit a fellow students' forest to learn from their experience and build friendships for the future. A total of 2540 trees were planted under this initiative in Malawi, and 1875 trees survived. We're currently processing student applications for this planting season.



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For comments, questions and errata regarding this newsletter, please contact the editor at the email address above. Every effort has been made to credit contributors to this newsletter. Where omissions have occurred, please advise and they will be rectified at the earliest possible opportunity.



Medic to Medic



@MedictoMedic



tamsinlillie

[www.medictomedic.org.uk](http://www.medictomedic.org.uk)

Registered UK Charity No. 1149904  
NZ Charity No. CC58085. Malawi CONGOMA  
registration No. C1609/2022

Medic to Medic was founded in 2007 to address the problems of training and retaining medical students in some of the world's poorest countries.

For our first country, we chose Malawi. Like so many sub-Saharan countries, Malawi is desperately short of doctors. It has just two doctors per 100 000 people. The UK has over 230 per 100 000.

Medic to Medic helps by supporting poor but bright students through medical school, who might otherwise drop out. We cover their tuition fees and give them allowances for equipment and books. We can link students to mentors, who provide holistic support.

Our scheme to support medical students has been so successful that we now also support physiotherapists, pharmacists, nurses, mental health workers, clinical officers, optometrists & audiologists in Malawi.

Most of our donors give just £5—20 per month. If you feel you can support a student, please visit [www.medictomedic.org.uk](http://www.medictomedic.org.uk) to set up a direct debit online.

You will be linked with an individual student and receive regular updates from them on their progress. You are welcome to enter into email correspondence with them and many of our students find this very motivating. Please note that although you will be allocated a particular student, our donations are pooled so that no student is disadvantaged if a donor needs to withdraw.

## Future Fundraising

Nominate Medic to Medic to win £1000 through Ecclesiastical. Our charity number is 1149904. <https://www.movementforgood.com/12days/#nominateACharity>



guineapig

Interested in raising donations through market research?

Email for more info: [info@medictomedic.org.uk](mailto:info@medictomedic.org.uk)



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<https://charitable.travel/medic-to-medic/>



Donate using Pledjar

The free app that uses the latest technology to round up your total daily transactions to donate to a charity of your choice.



## School Talks

Medic to Medic students and alumni have been visiting schools to encourage attending students to pursue medical careers in health.

We've long since heard that students with a lack of role models become bored resulting in school drop outs and teenage pregnancies. We hope that students sharing their educational journeys will help inspire younger learners.

Many students in Malawi have heard of nurses and doctors, but there are a whole range of other health professionals who care for their communities. Sharing knowledge will improve health literacy in schools. We've visited two schools already and hope to be visiting many more during 2023!