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USAID Awards Cooperative Agreement to Global AIDS Interfaith Alliance (GAIA) to Strengthen Malawi's Health System

GAIA Announces Partnership with UCSF School of Nursing, Kamuzu College of Nursing, and Jhpiego

October 15, 2010 (San Francisco, California.) The Very Rev. William Rankin, former President and Dean of the Episcopal Divinity School and currently President and CEO of Global AIDS Interfaith Alliance (GAIA) today announced a \$1.7 million dollar, 5-year grant from USAID to train 40 new nurses and to bolster the Malawi health care system through training already-practicing nurses in three key skills. The USAID-GAIA Malawi Nurse Education Project is targeted at combating HIV/AIDS and maternal mortality, and improving emergency care. The 40 nurses will be trained at Kamuzu College of Nursing (KCN) in Malawi, joining 168 others already supported with GAIA funds. In collaboration with the University of California San Francisco School of Nursing, KCN, and Jhpiego (an affiliate of Johns Hopkins University) the award will also provide training to 400 Malawi nurses to boost skills in three key areas: antiretroviral therapy for HIV/AIDS, basic emergency obstetrical care, and triage.

Malawi struggles with huge health challenges. Some 930,000 of its 14 million people are HIV-positive, and the epidemic has created over 500,000 orphans. At the same time Malawi's maternal mortality ratio is one of the highest in the world, with over 800 mothers dying for every 100,000 live births. Almost half of all births take place outside

of health facilities, and even in health facilities workers are undertrained and function with limited resources. One in every 10 Malawi children dies before reaching age 5.

One of the obstacles to improving health care in Malawi is the lack of trained healthcare professionals, particularly nurses. Currently there are 37 nurses for every 100,000 people, compared to over 900 for the same number of people in the U.S. Though limited in number, nurses are the backbone of the health system in Malawi and provide most of the country's health care.

With a focus on improving AIDS patients' quality of care, empowering Malawian women, and helping to reduce the maternal mortality rate in Malawi, the first goal of the USAID-GAIA Malawi Nurse Education Project is to expand GAIA's Nursing Scholar Program providing scholarship assistance to qualified Malawian women who have been admitted to nursing schools but cannot afford to attend. Many of these young women are AIDS orphans, often supporting younger siblings and family members. To date, GAIA has supported 209 Scholars. The USAID grant will include 10 men among the 40 new students in two classes of 20 each. Graduates agree to work in Malawi government clinics and hospitals for 4 years after graduation.

The second goal of the project is to build the expertise of practicing nurses by ensuring proficiency in HIV/AIDS care, emergency obstetrical care, and triage. Through a train-the-trainer model, the project will build the capacity of nursing school faculty to assure competency in these skills for nurses in training and for practicing nurses through in-service education.

Nursing Scholar Case Studies:



The GAIA Nursing Program was started in 2005, with the support of the Gruber Family Foundation. The first GAIA Scholar to graduate was Ms. Kaboni Gondwe, who completed her studies in 2007. She distinguished herself as a student, served on the pediatrics ward of Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital in Blantyre, and then was subsequently hired in a faculty position at the Kamuzu College of Nursing. She recently won a Fulbright scholarship to pursue her master's degree at Ohio University, and will return to the Kamuzu College faculty after completion.

Another Nursing Scholar, "Annie" told her story to GAIA. An orphan herself, she worked as a laundress to pay her high school fees. She tells GAIA, "Life was so harsh. Where to get fees, where to get a uniform, pocket money, these made my days miserable. I went in search of piece work at teacher's homes, washing their clothes to raise money for fees. When I

could not raise the money, the school would chase me from the campus. But I stuck around, peeking at my classmate's notes and trying to make sense of them.

When I got to my village, I could not eat, only thinking, 'If I were at school...' When I saw the lights from the school, I would enter my grass thatched room and start weeping. But nobody was to blame, for the aunt I lived with was a single lady in her 80s." Annie applied to nursing school, but wept the day she was accepted, because she thought that she would never be able to afford the tuition. Then she learned about the GAIA program and became a GAIA Scholar.

This year Annie graduated and has joined the ranks of Malawi's nurse workforce.

In a country where the average annual income is \$200, these women are gaining an education and raising their economic status, becoming change agents and role models, and creating a ripple effect for their families and communities.

About GAIA

GAIA's (www.thegaia.org) mission is to deliver HIV related basic health services to rural villages and health facilities in Africa.

Our approach to preventing and treating HIV involves strengthening healthcare institutions, improving the delivery of healthcare services and working closely with communities to empower local people, particularly women, in the struggle against HIV.

GAIA was founded in 2000 by retired Episcopal priest, The Rev. Dr. William Rankin, and world-renowned neurosurgeon, Dr. Charles Wilson. Dr. Rankin serves as President and C.E.O. GAIA has received substantial support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and The Elizabeth Taylor HIV/AIDS Foundation.

This project is enabled by the generosity of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development



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