

GAIA Update

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Disrupting a deadly disease combination



Rains now fall upon Malawi and with them come mosquitoes and malaria. Malaria is terrible in itself, being the greatest killer of African children, but when it is contracted by people living with HIV the combined effects may be horrendous.

Having high levels of HIV in your blood makes one particularly infectious. Unfortunately a single malaria episode causes a sevenfold virus level increase in an individual. This will last 6 to 8 weeks.

We have partnered with San Francisco-based Netgain Malawi to bring about the distribution of insecticide-saturated bed nets in 8 southern Malawi villages where we have worked intensively for over 3 years. If, as we expect, this results in lowered malaria rates then we hope to include many more villages in bed net distributions.

Below is a report coming our way from Netgain's Kimberly Baltzell, RN, Ph.D.

Bed nets reduce malaria episodes by at least 50%, decrease severe malaria disease by 29%, and lower child mortality rates by at least 18%. Of all malaria interventions, bed nets are the most cost effective way to prevent deaths, but they are not widely available because of logistical and operational challenges. NetGain-Malawi aims to provide bed nets for villages in the GAIA network. We traveled to Malawi last October to meet with GAIA staff and assess the GAIA infrastructure for piloting bed net distribution. Villagers (none having bed nets) confirmed that these are greatly desired but unaffordable. We were aware of a 90% malaria infection rate in this area over the past 48 months. NetGain hired GAIA coordinators and community-care givers, who have now distributed nets to 3000 people in 8 villages. Caregivers will continuously monitor our progress. Using private donations, NetGain-Malawi will provide bed netting for the remaining villages in this GAIA system. The project's great success potential is helped by GAIA's remarkable service delivery infrastructure.

We believe strongly in NetGain-Malawi and are very glad to add them as partners with us and our African colleagues.

William Rankin

