

Helping kids survive

A model for diagnosis and treatment of childhood cancer, **West Africa**

Childhood cancer is largely curable – in developed countries, more than 80% of children survive. In the developing world, however, survival rates are only 10%. World Child Cancer (WCC) seeks to address this gross disparity by expanding the workforce of well-trained childhood cancer specialists and increasing awareness around the signs and symptoms of childhood cancer at each level of the healthcare system.

The problem

As more children survive early childhood, the number of children who develop cancer in sub-Saharan Africa is likely to rise considerably over the next generation. Already it is estimated that 63,400 children under the age of 14 develop cancer in sub-Saharan Africa each year, over 50,000 of which will go without access to treatment or palliative care.

This is in large part due to two major barriers faced by children with cancer in sub-Saharan Africa: the shortage of well-trained healthcare workers specializing in childhood cancer care, and the lack of awareness around the signs and symptoms of childhood cancer. As a result, non-diagnosis, misdiagnosis and late diagnosis are all too common. For those children who do receive a diagnosis, it is usually very late when symptoms have escalated and the cancer is less treatable. And accessing treatment often requires traveling long distances, even across borders, or being treated by a provider lacking the appropriate expertise.

The partner

WCC’s mission is to improve diagnosis, treatment and support in the developing world for children with cancer and their families, so that every child with cancer has equal access to the best treatment and care. Over the past ten years WCC has worked to improve services for over 20,000 children with cancer.

The philanthropic solution

To strengthen critical skills and improve the quality of pediatric cancer care, with the support of UBS Optimus Foundation, WCC developed West Africa’s first Center of Excellence for pediatric oncology at Korle Bu Teaching Hospital in Accra, Ghana. The Center of Excellence—now successfully emerging—provides a regional training hub for pediatric oncologists across sub-Saharan Africa, with locally owned, accredited courses

recognized by the West Africa Colleges developed for clinicians, pharmacists and nurses, and delivered to initial cohorts of students through appropriate national colleges. This regional center has benefitted health services across West Africa through the training opportunities made available to staff from Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nigeria, and other countries where WCC works – primarily Malawi and Cameroon. This next phase of the program will focus on strengthening the Ghana Center of Excellence and progressing nascent pediatric oncology services in other countries; improving access to diagnosis and care by creating stronger links within wider health services and increasing community awareness of childhood cancer; and improving data collection, analysis, and research to support both service improvement and advocacy for its better resourcing.

The evidence

WCC successfully established the Center of Excellence at Korle Bu in just three years. Now the first fellows from Ghana are graduating from the pediatric oncology clinical course, and residents from Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nigeria and Cameroon have joined the course. The first 17 nurses graduated from the one-year pediatric oncology nurse course at the Ghana College of Nurses and Midwives (GCNM) at the end of 2021. The first three students enrolled on the pharmacy fellowship course in 2021. In aggregate these efforts have helped to improve overall childhood cancer survival rates in Ghana from 49% in 2018 to 64% in 2020.

The impact

WCC seeks to increase the quality of, and improve access to, pediatric oncology care and increase the number of children with cancer who receive a diagnosis and complete treatment, ultimately leading to increase in one-year survival rates to 70%.

Location	Accra, Ghana
Target group	1,550 children (direct); 22 professionals
Partner(s)	Korle Bu Teaching Hospital; Ghana College of Physicians and Surgeons; Lifeline for Childhood Cancer; Unit for Policy and Economic Research in Childhood Cancer; Red Cross War Memorial Children’s Hospital (CH); Leeds CH; Boston CH; International Society of Pediatric Oncology
Co-sponsors	
Grant total	CHF 1,000,000
SDG(s)	3
Duration	5 years
Program ID	47679E

All programmatic data provided by World Child Cancer. The UBS Optimus Foundation is a grant-making foundation that offers UBS clients a platform to use their wealth to drive positive social and environmental change. The Foundation selects programs that improve children's health, education and protection, ones that have the potential to be transformative, scalable and sustainable as well as programs tackling environmental and climate issues.

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