On November 18, 2013, the University of Liberia (UL) marked the official opening of the Faculty Resource Room in the Natural Sciences building on the Fendall campus. The room was renovated under the direction of the Center for Excellence in Health and Life Sciences (CEHLS) to support improved research and instructional capacity for the life sciences.

CEHLS, made possible by a USAID/HED award worth $2.6 million, brings together UL, Indiana University (IU) and University of Massachusetts Medical School (UMMS) in an academic partnership focused on strengthening the capacity of the health workforce in Liberia through enhanced health and life science programs offered at UL and Tubman National Institute of Medical Arts (TNIMA).

In addition to the resource room, life science instructors now have access to demonstration tables, microscopes, and AV equipment to support new biology curriculum, which was updated and revised by UL instructors in collaboration with CEHLS visiting specialist, Dr. John Berestecky, and approved for use by the Faculty Senate and Board of Trustees in Summer 2013. Updates to the Anatomy and Physiology curriculum at the A.M. Dogliotti College of Medicine are ongoing with support from UMMS faculty and have resulted in the reintroduction of the cadaver dissection program.

The use of digital formats for teaching as well as data collection for evidence-based practice will be a focus of additional training when new resource centers are installed at JFK Memorial Hospital and A.M.D. College of Medicine, scheduled for June 2014. In addition to the computer equipment, UMMS has donated 45 microscopes, 62 laptops, 70 boxes of medical textbooks, an incubator, and centrifuge.
Liberia’s high neonatal mortality rate of 27 deaths per 1,000 births makes the need for improved prenatal and postnatal health care a matter of life and death (UNICEF, At a Glance, Statistics: http://www.unicef.org). Following years of conflict, the nation is steadily moving closer to providing reliable and efficient health care services for expectant mothers and infants, a cornerstone for a thriving society. To better prepare future health professionals, Liberian nurses Cynthia Bondoe and Ada Brown-Wraynee are two Tubman National Institute of Medical Arts (TNIMA) educators participating in a USAID project that embraces new methodologies to save lives.

Under the project among Indiana University (IU), the University of Massachusetts Medical School, the University of Liberia, and TNIMA, Cynthia and Ada were accepted to IU to complete their master’s degrees in nursing. “I really could not have pursued the master’s degree in Liberia because this type of program and the needed resources and technology do not exist in Liberia,” said Cynthia, a nurse educator since 2000. “My studies at IU have increased my knowledge and skills in the areas of teaching, evidence-based practice related to nursing theory, research and clinical practices.”

After receiving their master’s degrees, both nurses returned to Liberia to help develop curriculum for a new midwifery degree program at TNIMA and the University of Liberia. Now the more than 115 nursing students and 60 midwifery students attending these institutions will have the opportunity to enroll in the first publicly available baccalaureate nursing and midwifery degree programs starting in October 2014.

“Research on staffing in U.S. hospitals clearly shows better outcomes for patients when nurses have a BSN education. We would anticipate a lower mortality and morbidity rate for pregnant women as more nurses and midwives receive a baccalaureate education,” said Dr. Mary Beth Riner, associate dean for global affairs at IU’s School of Nursing.

The new curriculum will usher in a promising era in nurse education in Liberia. According to Riner, the current education of faculty has primarily used an apprenticeship approach where faculty members learn from other faculty and teach as they were taught as a student.

Cynthia and Ada also completed an American Academy of Pediatric Neonatal Resuscitation Program instructor course and were trained as trainers in the Helping Babies Breathe (HBB) technique. USAID is a partner of HBB, which is dedicated to providing birth attendants with neonatal resuscitation skills.

“Because of this partnership, we are presently conducting trainings in HBB with TNIMA physician’s assistants, professional nurses, senior midwifery students, and nursing and midwifery staff at the John F. Kennedy Medical Center in an effort to reduce infant and neonatal mortalities in Liberia,” said Cynthia. “I have gained skills in the demonstration of neonatal resuscitation and helping babies breathe.”
Here’s to Your Health:

AMD College of Medicine Graduates 38 Medical Doctors

Responding to the country’s need for an increase in medical doctors, the A.M. Dogliotti College of Medicine at UL, under the direction of Dean Vuyu Golakai, graduated a class of thirty-eight in December, 2013.

The number of graduates this year was in sharp contrast to the numbers from 2011, when the school only had the capacity to graduate a class of four. An important step in building the quality of an academic program is the recruitment of qualified members in the core disciplines. While there is still a need for key faculty in Anesthesiology and Pathology, for example, two doctors supported by the CEHLS grant have made a great impact on the school.

Drs. Roseda Marshall, Head of Pediatrics, and Michael Kiiza Kikubaire, Associate Professor of Surgery and Senior Consultant Surgeon at JFK Hospital, have contributed greatly to the advancement of research, graduate programing, and the establishment of the Liberia College of Physicians and Surgeons, launched in October 2013.

Dr. Marshall was also instrumental in designing and gaining support for a Graduate Medical Education (GME) program in Pediatrics, in collaboration with Dr. Stephen Kennedy (UL-Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation), Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, and World Bank. Plans are in place to continue to develop GME programs in Medicine, Surgery, and OB-GYN. UMMS has led the coalition of academic medical centers to support these efforts and to identify and recruit Liberian, West African, and US faculty.

Where ACADEMICS meets ACTION: Certificate in Public Health

It was shocking for the public health students to see that in an area adjacent to the Soniwein Health Clinic, sat the largest garbage collection site in all of Monrovia. Students Rebecca Robinson, a certified midwife, and Allen Gbeingan, an RN, were part of the first cohort of ten students in the newly designed Certificate in Public Health (CPH) program. The purpose of the visit was to gain experience in community-participatory approaches in key areas of preventive health in order to build a bridge between the clinic and the community. The students were particularly interested in water and sanitation in the community and were alarmed to find the hand pump within the health center unfit for drinking due to the underground pollution from the garbage. “The garbage had completely engulfed the clinic and made the hand-pump in the clinic unfit for use by the midwives for deliveries. The flies from the garbage swarms the patients while they are in the clinic,” lamented the chief administrator.

CPH Program Director, Dr. Mosoka Fallah and one of the instructors, Mr. Thomas Momo, joined the students and the hospital to review the intensity of the hazard and strategize solutions to the problem. They decided to hold a community forum with key stakeholders to discuss the best options. The lead administrator for the clinic sent out invitations through the marketing association, the community leaders and the CPH students invited the Monrovia City Corporation (MCC) and the Montserrado County Health team.

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Student Profile: Meet the Man behind the Machines

Member of UL’s Biology Student Association, Johnny Sokleh Montgomery, first met CEHLS visiting biology specialist, Dr. John Berestecky, during a department meeting to discuss the distribution and utilization of books donated by the Sabre Foundation through the CEHLS grant. Johnny remembers Dr. Berestecky asking him for his ideas on how to accomplish the daunting task of managing hundreds of books for up to 2,000 life science students. “Dr. Berestecky thought my opinion was brilliant and he then asked me to ‘run with it,’” Johnny recalls.

The result was the development and adoption of the Textbook Distribution Policy, managed by Johnny through the CEHLS Faculty Resource room on the Fendall campus. Since then, Johnny has taken a leadership role, working alongside CEHLS Country Director, Mrs. Ansahta Garnett, in the day to day management of the Faculty Resource Room, offering support to faculty by developing grade books on Excel, and tracking usage data for reporting.

Johnny appreciates his experience as a student volunteer for CEHLS and credits Mrs. Garnett for giving him room to explore his ideas, talents and capabilities. In addition to managing the logistics, Johnny uses his opportunities to interact with faculty and students to conduct surveys and informal meetings to evaluate the CEHLS activity within the Biology department. Input from these meetings is used to plan for trainings and make adjustments to existing procedures.

Johnny’s real dream is to bring about positive change to those around him. To this end, he “loves to volunteer with CEHLS, and will continue to volunteer wherever people are concerned about the wellbeing of others.” Johnny hopes to bring that spirit with him when he graduates and moves into his career, preferably in the field of Neuroscience.

(Continued from page 3) Certificate in Public Health Program

All key stakeholders were able to attend the meeting, and were glad that the CPH students were drawing attention to the problem as well as working on solutions. “We have been trying to solve this garbage problem, but it seems to defy every solution. We thank you for bringing all parties together to find a solution,” commended the representative from MCC, Mr. Zubah A. Flomo. A letter was drafted on behalf of the community requesting removal of the waste and delivered to MCC. The garbage was subsequently removed. The results of the community mobilization had yielded instantaneous results. The Public Health initiative had finally begun to solve a problem that the community thought defied a solution. Follow-up visits to the clinic and the garbage site was incredible, as the entire area remained cleared.

The CPH, launched in October 2013, is a collaboration between the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, the JFK Medical Center, and CEHLS. The first cohort of students finished coursework in January 2014 in five of the core public health competencies and are now at practicum sites throughout Monrovia. Since the outbreak of the Ebola virus, the students have been mobilized as “Trainers of Trainers” and are seen as valuable bridge between health care facilities and the communities they serve.

The first cohort of students completed 3-months of public health coursework before embarking on a 2-month practicum experience.  -February 2014