

2. MISSIONARY HEALTH SERVICES IN EAST AFRICA

The Health services in East Africa was pioneered by the Christian missionaries just as they did with education sector in the region. It is worth noting that, the early Christian missionaries in East Africa considered health services to be very necessary to themselves and to the people of East Africa in order to pave way for the rapid spread of Christianity in the region.

MISSIONARY EFFORTS IN THE PROVISION OF MEDICAL SERVICES IN EAST AFRICA

Missionaries established health oriented organizations that offered unique health services in East Africa. They for example established sight by wings in Lugala-Tanzania that offered specialized eye treatment to people in Tanzania and East Africa at large.

Missionaries put up health centers in form of clinics, dispensaries and hospitals from where they offered medical services to the people of East African. They for instance established a hospital at Bagamoyo and Mengo in Kampala-Uganda with the great influence of Dr. Albert cook.

They also provided the necessary technical personnel in form of doctors and nurses who looked after the patients. These for example included Dr Albert cook and his wife nurse Timpson who served at Mengo hospital in Kampala-Uganda.

Missionaries provided medical facilities in form of medicine, medical beds and other laboratory equipment that were used to offer quality services to the people. In 1897 for instance, Mengo hospital had 28 beds and by 1901 they had increased to 75 beds.

They also carried out missionary health journeys in different parts of East Africa that involved visiting the sick, offering counseling and medical treatment as well as praying with the sick. Dr. Albert cook for example traveled from Buganda to Ankole purposely to extend the same services.

Christian missionaries trained some Africans in medical services and put up medical schools such as Mengo medical school for this purpose. By 1958, there were already eighty-six (86) male and female nurses trained by missionaries in Tanganyika that greatly improved on the number of medical staff hence overcoming shortage of manpower in the region.

Missionaries also carried out health research on African diseases such as malaria, sleeping sickness, small pox and leprosy among others and tried to find out the appropriate vaccine to cure such diseases. This promoted good health in East Africa thus reducing on death rates.

Missionaries provided special needs education especially to the blind. They treated the blind and at the same time taught them. In Kenya for example, there were five (5) primary and seven (7) secondary schools for the blind established and run by missionaries by 1972.

They also provided special mobile health services that promoted health services in the hard to reach areas of East Africa. Sight by wings for example had a mobile air craft that served Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania at any time of emergency.

Missionaries worked closely with their home governments to offer better health services in East Africa. With the help of their home government, missionaries were for instance able to fund Kilimanjaro Christian medical Centre near Moshi in Tanzania in 1971 and Sight by wings in Lugala-Tanzania.

Missionary doctors offered charity services to the needy such as the old and the sick in East Africa by for example teaching on personal hygiene. Some missionaries even used their private resources to purchase blankets, foodstuffs, clothes and drinks among others for the needy so as to save many from dying.

Missionaries used the church to preach and teach against African herbal medicines which were actually dangerous and could cause health complications to the Africans. This as a result, made many people to resort using western medicines that were much effective in treating African deadly diseases like malarial, dysentery and sleeping sickness.

They also provided western formal education in East Africa with the major aim of changing African mindsets from using herbal medicine and convincing them to start taking western medicine like quinine a factor that actually saved Africans from deadliest diseases.

Missionaries provided funds/money for the establishment and smooth running of the health services in East Africa. The funds were for example used to pay salaries for the medical personnel that worked tirelessly in healthy facilities thus improving health sector in the region.

Missionaries also established strong links with health centers abroad to assist East Africans. sight by wings for instance offered a useful link of obtaining fresh eyes from the eye bank in Hayward Health Centre in England.

PROBLEMS FACED BY MISSIONARIES IN PROVISION OF HEALTH SERVICES IN EAST AFRICA

Missionaries faced a problem of inadequate finances to pay salaries and wages for medical workers, buy medicine and other healthy equipment needed for the provision of quality health services thus a big challenge encountered in abide to provide health services in East Africa.

They also had a problem of limited number of workers to work as doctors and nurses in established health facilities. This as a result, made missionary efforts fruitless since there were very many people who wanted treatment and yet the number of health workers was too small.

Missionaries faced a challenge of inadequate medical facilities like theatres, beds and laboratory equipment among others in some health institutions something which made medical investigations and treatment more complicated in East Africa.

Missionaries also encountered a challenge of shortage of medicine and delayed supply of medical facilities from their home countries like Britain, France and German thus frustrating their efforts in offering and improving health services in East Africa.

They also faced challenges with some rigid and conservative group of Africans who strongly believed in their African herbal medicine and thus changing them to take western medicine was a big problem. This as a result, delayed their healing and resulted into others dying of treatable diseases like malaria.

Slave raids and its insecurity greatly disrupted missionary health services in the interior of East Africa. In addition, some Africans were never free interacting with missionaries as they mistook them to be slave traders hence a big challenge to Christian missionaries.

Christian missionaries faced a problem of tropical diseases like malaria which weakened and killed some of them while in the interior of East Africa. Dr. Albert cook for example died of malaria a factor that contributed towards shortage of manpower to extend health services in the region.

Poor transport and communication especially in remote areas become a great obstacle to the Christian missionaries in offering health services in the region. This for instance complicated the movement of medical personnel and equipment like beds, drugs among others in the interior of East Africa.

Missionaries faced a problem of many Africans having a negative attitude towards European medicine thinking that it was intended to cause more health problems to them. As a result, some abandoned and ignored taking the drugs a factor that frustrated missionary efforts in improving health sector in the region.

The belief in the miraculous healing among African Christians converts coupled with the misinterpretation of the Biblical teachings also interfered with the missionary work of providing health services to Africans. Some African Christian converts equally gave up with western medicine like quinine expecting a miraculous healing with the powers of the holy spirit.

Missionaries medical personnel faced a challenge of moving long distances in a bid to deliver medical services especially to far remote areas of east Africa. This consequently, made them weak, tired and at times sick thus reducing on their labour output.

They also encountered hostility from some African tribes such as the Masai who did not want a white man to pass through their territories thus interfering with the missionaries' efforts of extending medical services to all areas of East Africa including the hostile communities.

Missionaries faced a challenge of insecurity that characterized the interior of East Africa caused by conflicts between clans, chiefdoms and kingdoms over territories. This strongly interfered with the movements of medical workers in the interior as many developed fears of losing lives hence hindering the health service in the region.

Geographical barriers like forests, lakes, rift valleys, swamps and rivers were among the challenges encountered by missionaries in their quest to offer medical services to the people of East Africa. These blocked the movements of medical personnel like doctors and nurses in some areas thus delaying the extension of health services in the region.

They also faced a challenge of language barrier as many of them could hardly understand or speak African local languages and yet the local people could also not understand foreign languages such as English, French and Latin among others thus complicating the diagnosis and treatment.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE CHURCH TODAY IN PROVIDING MEDICAL SERVICES IN EAST AFRICA

The church has established health centers in different parts of East Africa to offer medical services in the region. In Uganda for example, Bishop Kihangire medical Centre at Biina has been established thus providing better health care to the community and the surrounding areas.

The church has also recruited and deployed professional medical personnel in form of doctors and nurses to treat the sick people in its established hospitals within the region hence saving the community from mysterious diseases like cholera, malaria, dysentery among others.

The church has today continued to provide free drugs and treatment to the sick people passing through its established health facilities. It has for instance given free ARVs to people living with HIV/AIDs hence increasing on their life spans on earth.

The church has also supported and promoted government health programs such as immunization programs by calling upon parents to immunize their children against the killer diseases hence a great contribution towards improving on the health sector in the region.

The church has sponsored many students to study medicine and other health medical courses both within the country and abroad. This has consequently helped to increase on the number of health workers in established hospitals and the country at large thus improving on the health service delivery.

The church in Uganda has also played a fundamental role of forming the Uganda Christian joint medical council established with a major objective of promoting good medical services in the country such as offering treatment, guiding and counseling the sick among other medical roles.

The church has today solicited for funds from developed countries such as China, the USA, Israel among other great countries to support health program in Uganda. The funds are used to pay salaries for medical workers, purchase health drugs, laboratory equipment and also establish more hospitals in the country thus a great contribution.

The church in Uganda has jointly worked with government in providing health services in the country. It has for instance offered free HIV testing and counseling services with the help of the government hence a commendable contribution towards improving the health sector in Uganda.

The church institution has also carried out health journeys in different parts of East Africa including the remote areas, treating people with different illnesses, sensitizing masses on personal hygiene and offering guidance and counseling services to communities.

The church has constructed big hospitals in East Africa which treat complicated diseases. In Uganda for instance, the Catholic Church has expanded lubaga and Nsambya hospitals whereas Mengo hospital has been expanded by the protestant church hence a great contribution.

The church has today continued to offer free guidance and counseling services especially to people leaving with HIV/AIDS hence helping many to overcome stigma, accept their status, take medication and also live positively in societies.

The church has also established medical schools to train more health workers especially the nurse. In Uganda for instance, the church has established Nsambya medical school and Mengo medical school in the country thus increasing on the medical man power.

Some of the church leaders have also doubled as medical workers working in the hospitals to supplement on the shortage of man power in hospitals. These for example include the Nuns in catholic hospitals who work tirelessly to extend health services in the country.

The church has tried to link its established hospitals like Mengo hospital, Rubaga hospital and others to modern hospitals abroad. This has hence helped to extend better medical services such as treating complicated diseases like cancer in East Africa.

PROBLEMS THE CHURCH IN EAST AFRICA HAS FACED IN THE PROVISION OF HEALTH SERVICES

The church institution has faced a problem of in adequate funds to facilitate the provision of quality health services to the sick. This has for instance caused hardships in paying salaries and wages for medical workers and also open up more hospitals in the country.

The church has also faced a problem of shortage of man power in form of doctors and nurses who are too few to treat a big number of patients in the region. This has thus caused tire and fatigue to the few available medical personnel hence causing insufficient health service.

Insecurity in some areas characterized with wars has also become a big challenge to the church in offering health service. This as a result, has disrupted transportation of medical equipment and facilities like drugs as well as causing fear among medical workers to work in war affected areas.

The church has faced a challenge of hostile tribes in some parts of East Africa such as the Karamojong of Uganda and the Turkana of Kenya. These have acted against the provision of health services due to their conservatism hence limiting church work in offering better health services in the region.

The church has also encountered a challenge of limited land to build more health centers and expand the existing ones especially in urban areas like Kampala.

The emergence of new and rare diseases like Ebola, Marburg, corona etc. have caused a big challenge to the church medical department. This has weakened lives of medical personnel serving in church established hospitals and even claimed a good number of them thus causing shortage of man power.

Rigidity and conservatism among Some Africans has also become a big challenge to the church medical department. These tend to be too confident of their traditional medicine/ herbs something that has interfered with the church provision of modern drugs.

The church has faced the problem of Poor roads especially in some remote areas which have made it hard for the church to carry out its health missionary journeys as well as transport medical requirements such as drugs, beds and laboratory equipment.

Rampant corruption among some church leaders is also a big challenge that the church in East Africa is fighting with in a bid to offer health service in the region. Some selfish church leaders have diverted and misused the health funds received as donations from abroad to meet personal interests.

The church has also continued to encounter interferences from unfriendly government policies such as heavy taxation that have greatly reduced on church funds thus hindering with its work of providing medical services to the patients.

Illiteracy among many people of East Africa is also a problem to the church while struggling to offer and improve health services in the region. Due to illiteracy, some people have failed to follow the instructions of taking drugs and also adhere to special medical advices.

The church in East Africa has faced a problem of inadequate medical facilities in some hospitals in form of beds, medical machines like x-ray machines, ambulances among others. This has sometimes caused difficulties in conducting medical investigations and treatment of the sick patients.

The church in East Africa has also faced a challenge of misinterpretation of the biblical teaching by some African converted Christians. These have strongly believed in miraculous healing by the powers of the holy spirit hence ignoring to take western medicines a factor that has interfered with the efforts of the church to improve on the health sector in the region.

Study Questions:

- 1.a) Show the contribution made by the church in providing medical services in Uganda today.
- (b) What limitations has the church faced in this endeavor?
- 2.a) Explain the role of the missionaries in trying to provide medical services to the people of East Africa.
- b) Discuss the obstacles the missionaries faced in their effort to provide medical services.