

PHILADELPHIA PHARMACIST IN KENYA

"Not a day goes by without thinking of the Victory Academy staff, the students, their parents and their medical needs. After I witnessed the desperation of people living in poverty and trying to survive, giving service to Kenya is the very least that we can do." Dr Pitts



Dr Pitts dispensing medications in Majengo, Kenya. All pictures in this article were taken by Dr Pitts and traveling colleagues.

Kenya

The gross national income per capita in Kenya is USD540 and 90% of the population lives in rural, small villages. Since most humans live in small, remote villages, the issue of access to healthcare and education is enormous. The population is overwhelmed with diseases such as malaria, respiratory illnesses, HIV/AIDS, and gastrointestinal worms. The effects of hunger, malnutrition, and anemia are widespread.



Local pharmacy in Mtwapa, Kenya.



Physician examines children at Victory Academy clinic.

Cornelius D Pitts IV

2005: Member of Pennsylvania Drug, Device and Cosmetic Board

2004: Member of the Health Promotion Council of Southeastern Pennsylvania

2004: PharmD, University of the Sciences in Philadelphia (USP)

2002: Founding board member of Bibles Books and Shovels, Inc.

From 2000: Member of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

From 1982: employee of GlaxoSmithKline Pharmaceuticals, currently Director of Psychiatry, Neurosciences Medicines Development Center

1973: Bachelor of Science, Univ Sciences in Philadelphia (then known as Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science)

The cost for treatments for HIV/AIDS are low, but not low enough for most: a month of life-lengthening HIV/AIDS treatment may cost USD25 per month. The financial barriers to treatment are compounded with scarcity of healthcare professionals. It is rare for villagers to see a healthcare professional. Most medical clinics are overcrowded with patients suffering from infectious diseases such as malaria, HIV, and respiratory infections.

Employment in small villages can be sporadic and difficult to find anyway. In the villages of Mtwapa and Majengo, most people work at craft shops, at vegetable and food stands owned by the local farmers, day work as a Matatu driver, or at a local shoe factory. The shoe factory makes sandals, but due to the lack of materials, it is not always open. The mode of transportation from village to village is by a Matatu (a small bus or van) and a small fee is

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Quick Facts on Kenya in 2005

Population, total millions	34.3
Population growth (annual %)	2.3
Surface area (sq. km) (thousands)	580.4
Life expectancy at birth, total (years)	49
Mortality rate, infant (per 1,000 live births)	79
GNI (current USD) (billions)	18.6
GNI per capita, Atlas method (current USD)	540
Prevalence of HIV, % of population of 15-49	6.1

Source: World Development Indicators

charged to riders. Many poor villagers can not afford the Matatu fees, so they may rarely leave their village and certainly not to visit a medical clinic. The mud roads and flooding conditions contribute to more transportation hazards. Also, there is no electricity in most villages.

Kenyan School System

The Kenyan government has mandated all children should attend school from preschool to 8th grade in public schools.

Secondary school is optional and many high schools are few and far apart (250 to 500 miles away) and may cost USD300 to USD1,000 per year. Due to these hurdles, most students do not continue to secondary school.

According to the UNICEF statistics for 2000 to 2005, the net school enrollment ratio drops from 77 (primary school) to 40 (secondary school). The net primary school enrollment ratio is the number of children enrolled in primary school who belong to the age group that officially corresponds to primary schooling, divided by the total population of the same age group. Kenyan students are not attaining the higher levels of education required for today's highly technical and global world.

First Visit



Medical Clinic in Kikambala, Kenya.



Children from a school near Mtwapa, Kenya.

Cornelius Pitts PharmD is a pharmacist, a senior manager in an international pharmaceutical company, GlaxoSmithKline and an alumnus of University of Sciences in Philadelphia (USP). He told me his story when I interviewed him in July 2007.

In 2001 Dr Pitts, who has traveled to Kenya several times, met Mr. Mike Minor at a Baptist ministry retreat, and heard stories of his travels to Kenya. Mr Minor had met a teacher, Miss Aileen Kisenga in Majengo where she was teaching 35 elementary age students under the shade of a tree in a remote area north of Mombasa, Kenya. Mr Minor and his traveling companions were impressed with her commitment as a teacher and asked her how they could assist her with her students. Miss Kisenga asked for pencils, papers, and books. The members in the group were touched by this incidental meeting with this teacher and how it heightened their awareness of educational problems in Kenya.

Initially, this group thought all they needed to do was send these supplies to assist Miss Kisenga's program. Generous donations with 18 boxes of back packs, pencils, books and paper were collected from churches and individual donors in and around Wilmington, Delaware (Wilmington is 30 miles south of Philadelphia). Then, they realized the task of collecting and shipping materials to Kenya was far more involved. It took months from the promise to send supplies to Miss Kisenga and her school children to reach the school. The lack of infrastructure, bad roads, no electricity and shipping complications all contributed to the delay.

The group soon realized that a more focused effort was required and sending financial support was needed to address the broader educational needs of this impoverished area. The Victory Academy, a private school near near Mtwapa in Majengo was identified as their focus for meeting these needs.

Victory Academy was started by Mr and Mrs Kinuthia

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Children in class at Victory Academy, above and below.

about 8 years ago on their land in Majengo. They had conceptualized the school and had supported Victory Academy through its various development phases. The school manager is their son, Ezra Kinuthia. The average class size is 20 students and provides better education and security than the free, overcrowded (100 students per class) in the public government schools.

The strategic, focused objective of supporting Victory Academy was implemented with the founding of *Bibles Books and Shovels*. Five years ago, the nonprofit, 501-C-3 organization was founded in the state of Delaware. The name represents the 3-fold purpose of the organization. These include spreading the word of the Bible, supporting the education program and improving the economic conditions of the Kenyan program.



Read more about the mission, history and ongoing work of *Bibles, Books and Shovels*, at <http://www.biblesbooksandshovels.net>.



School children at Masai Village

The initial goal was to sponsor 15 students at Victory Academy by paying tuition, uniforms and books. Miss Rose Atieno, who lives in one of the nearby villages, is one of the teachers and also responsible for managing the day-to-day aspects of this ambitious school program while *Bibles, Books and Shovels* raises funds and otherwise administers the program from this side of the Atlantic Ocean.

The sponsored students were selected based upon financial need, scholastic ability, and Miss Atieno's recommendations.

It costs USD700 per student annually at the Victory Academy. Long term, post graduation goals are to empower the students to return to their villages as community leaders upon completion of their education.

In 2006, Dr Pitts and other medical professionals from Nairobi and nearby Kikambala worked in a small medical clinic and saw 70 patients in 1 day. In his capacity as a pharmacist, he dispensed medicines to the patients with the help of an interpreter. The Kenya headquarters (based in Nairobi) of his employer, GlaxoSmithKline, donated antibiotics to help fight infectious diseases and gastrointestinal worms.

Ms Robynn Pitts accompanied him on his last trip. Ms Pitts is a school psychologist in the Philadelphia school district, and is Dr Pitts' daughter. She volunteered to register patients at the medical clinic and also to assess some students with developmental behavior issues. This was the first time school staff had access to a psychologist and were able to dis-

Bibles Books and Shovels, Inc. is looking for volunteers, business partners, and donors to assist with making the Victory Academy program a continued success and a self-sustaining community.

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Monkey mother and baby in Kenya.

discuss the resolution of behavior problems.

In 2006 the first student graduated from Victory Academy from the 8th grade and met all the secondary requirements. Her name is Agnes, and she was accepted at a secondary school 250 miles away from home. Agnes is doing well in her new school.

Holistic Approach - Wellness of the Community

Bibles Books and Shovels realized that education does not exist in a vacuum. Health and welfare needs are crucial for both the success of students in the classrooms and the wellness of the community.

A local physician at his small medical clinic, Dr Stephen Chula has been commissioned to treat the children and their families. For USD100 per month, Dr Chula treats the students for emerging medical problems. The prevalence of respiratory infections, gastrointestinal worms, and malaria is high.

The average income in Kenya is approximately USD1 per day, lower than the World Development Indicators (chart above). High poverty rate, hunger, malnutrition, and anemia are common afflictions in the areas of Kenya

that Dr Pitts visits.

Bibles Books and Shovels also helped to meet emergency food needs for students and their families.

Future plans and goals

Biannually, teams of volunteers and missionaries from the United States are sent with donated supplies and to assess needs and evaluate progress in the school. The next trip is scheduled for July to August 2008. One of the goals for this trip is development of water wells to benefit the school and the villages and to conduct another medical clinic.

Some long term goals include:

- Water well for fresh water

- Nutritional support

- Subsidized medical assistance for the village

- Electricity for the school

- Computers

- Internet connection hook-up

- Full secondary school for all the children - accreditation for Grades 9 - 12.

By A Hodge MBA

Dr Pitts' favorite memory of Kenya

"Working in partnership with the Victory Academy staff, and the clinic staff and trying to make a difference."



Children in Majengo.