



Growing old with dignity.

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To live a long time, you have to get old



Dr med Svend Capol
President of SolidarMed

Can you imagine trying to use a Zimmer frame in the mountains of Lesotho, where there are practically no even surfaces? During my deployment for SolidarMed, I was making my monthly round of the remote health centres. High up on the side of a mountain, I saw a man making his way down with his elderly father who was unable to walk. The son was pushing his father in a wheelbarrow he had borrowed from a building site. The old man was suffering from severe arthrosis in addition to chronic lung disease, which was weakening him further. With the resources available in Switzerland, we would have been very able to help the old man. A joint replacement and a steady supply of specific medication, coupled with a healthy diet and nursing support to ensure he took his medication regularly – his life would have been made significantly easier.

Aging is not a disease. Over the course of a long life, the development of some kind of infirmity is practically inevitable. Over time, such complaints often develop into chronic diseases. In a well-developed health system, many of the ailments of old-age can be alleviated. But this depends not only on a broad spectrum of health services, but also access to these same services and their affordability, ensured by integrated

health care and a functioning health insurance system, for example.

With powerful images from Lesotho, our goodwill ambassador Nik Hartmann's series of slide show presentations this past November impressively showed just how many hurdles have to be overcome in the care of the elderly. The photographic portraits of the elderly women and men said more than a thousand words. Their lined faces spoke of all they had endured and of their hopes for recovery.

With constant commitment and steady improvement of the medical care, we can justify their hopes. Your support helps SolidarMed achieve this – thank you very much!

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SolidarMed is the Swiss organisation for health in Africa and improves health care for 1.5 million people. SolidarMed strengthens and expands existing medical services sustainably and meaningfully. The projects pay particular attention to the health of mothers, pregnant women, newborns and children.





Photo: Olivier Brandenburg

Finally arrived. A patient waits to be seen front of the out-patient department.

When the distances get longer

The myth that the elderly in Africa are held in high esteem and looked after by their children is becoming ever more divorced from reality. Many older people depend on accessible health care.

The UN predicts that by 2050, more than 2 billion people worldwide will be over 60 years old. First and foremost, this is very good news: ever fewer people are dying of preventable disease.

Nearly twice as old

One of them is Ntate Mputsoe from Ha Sephoko in Lesotho. He survived life-threatening infectious diseases as a child and the HIV epidemic

as an adult. With his 82 years, he has lived twice as long as his fellow countrymen do today.

Children moved away

This morning, friendly Mr Mputsoe arrives at the health centre in Montmartre quite late. On his way from his village, he took a detour to collect his pension. ▶



Lesotho:
 Inhabitants 2'074'000
 Doctors per 1000 inhabitants 0,26
 Average life expectancy 49 years

Elderly and alone. Often, their descendants have already died or are seeking a better life in town.

In Lesotho, all people over the age of 70 are entitled to a small pension. This allows Ntate Mputsoe in his sparsely furnished dwelling to get by. His wife died a long time ago and his adult children all moved away. They had no prospects in the remote mountain valley in which they grew up.

Knowledge is lacking

The old man is grateful for the health centre nearby. Here, he regularly collects medication to treat his high blood pressure. Reaching the next hospital in Thaba Tseka requires a 5 hour car journey or 15 hours on horseback. For the elderly, this is not an alternative. Mr Mputsoe appreciates the regular care in Montmartre. He sits in contented silence as he is examined and weighed and the nurse takes his blood pressure. Three years ago, American assistance enabled the building of new health centres throughout Lesotho, and their infrastructure is impressive: Even remote Montmartre now has enough space to treat the patients and all the most important medical instruments are available. But like nearly everywhere in rural Africa, what is lacking is qualified staff able to diagnose and effectively treat the patients.

Mputsoe Mputose (82) from the village of Ha Sephoke is a penniless widower. For now, he is still able to walk to the health centre unaided to collect his medication.



Photo: SolidarMed



Supporting health workers

The growing number of old people only increase the high demands placed on the nursing staff, as the elderly often suffer from chronic diseases which require complex long-term treatment. Since 2014, SolidarMed has ensured that staff in the health centres of Butha-Butha and Thaba Tseka district receive intensive support in the diagnosis and treatment of tuberculosis, diabetes or hypertension. Every month, specialised SolidarMed nurses spend a couple of days at every health centre, supporting the health staff as their specific situation requires. This has enhanced the staff's clinical skills and improved how the health centres are organised.

Pills not prosthesis

But the limits of what is possible are quite narrow: how do you help an elderly person with acute arthrosis in the mountains of Lesotho? Worn-out joints cause a lot of pain. In Europe, they are replaced by prosthetic joints. But such complex treatment is not possible in Montmartre.



Photo: Maurice Haas

This health centre lacks everything you would need to do this: an operating theatre, the necessary supplies, appropriately trained staff and of course the funds. Not even physiotherapy is possible, which is why currently painkillers are the only option to alleviate these ailments.

«The number of elderly, chronically ill patients in our partner hospitals is increasing.»

Dr med Karolin Pfeiffer, SolidarMed

Thankful for the help

Mputsoe Mputsoe only has to look after himself, but this is getting harder with every passing year. His only hope lies with his neighbours and the health centre nearby. After his health check is complete, he says his goodbyes and slowly makes his way home, grateful for the medication which helps his dizziness and nausea.

More about the SolidarMed projects:
www.solidarmed.ch > Topics

«Nobody gets on horseback with joint disease.»

SolidarMed also considers the needs of people above sixty.

SolidarMed: What does «getting old» mean in Lesotho?

Karolin Pfeiffer: It means to have survived many health challenges. It starts at birth, continues through infancy and carries on through adult life.

Why does SolidarMed help the elderly?

For ethical reasons, services to improve health should be accessible to all people. Older people find it particularly difficult to reach health services and thus it is even more important that these are offered as close to the patient as possible.

What do you mean by close?

Especially in old age there are more and more patients who can barely raise themselves out of a chair. Walking to a health centre is unthinkable and with acute arthrosis, no-one is getting on horseback. This is why SolidarMed supports remote health centres and assists them in their regular outreach services to the very remote valleys.

What are the most common afflictions?

Physical «wear and tear» is one aspect. But in old age, ailments like eye diseases, dental problems, hypertension and diabetes also increase.

What is your wish for the elderly of Lesotho?

With all my heart, I wish Lesotho's elderly – like our own in Switzerland – good health. They've had a hard life and should be able to rely on appropriate medical care in their vicinity. Well-trained health staff at the closest health centre, the most important medical supplies and services – geared to their particular needs – help them a lot. SolidarMed can have a big impact here.



Dr med Karolin Pfeiffer,
Desk Officer for Lesotho



Fresh air against bats

Tanzania: Maintaining buildings is an ongoing challenge in Africa's tropical climates. Particular pests are the many bats which feel right at home in the roof gables of the hospital buildings. These animals – so useful in nature – are not only out of place at the hospital for hygienic reasons, but their ammonia-rich droppings destroy a ceiling in just a couple of years.

Inspired by a small health facility in southern Tanzania, SolidarMed at Lugala Hospital developed the idea of a floating roof further. This open roof construction allows for better air circulation and lets in more light. What the patients like, the bats abhor – and the roof is preserved for many years. The «bat proof roof»: an idea with potential!

Over the past years, SolidarMed has been able to secure basic medical services in the two districts of Zaka and Blkita, and has shown that health services can be maintained in the face of adversity.

Now, these benefits will be extended to the 315'000 people in the southern neighbouring district of Chiredzi. Located in the southernmost corner of the country with health centres that are very difficult to reach in the rainy season, the population of this district only has very limited access to health services. From this year onwards, SolidarMed will expand the project activities to Chiredzi, where the health facilities currently receive no external help and the quality of treatment and care in the medical facilities is inadequate.



Photo: Maurice Haas

No HIV in children

Moçambique: In the district of Chiúre, SolidarMed has, over the past ten years, developed the necessary structures to ensure that even in this remote district, the health services can react to HIV. In the meantime, even in this very poor region it is possible for HIV-positive patients to survive their disease thanks to medical therapy. This is made possible by trained local health staff, sufficiently equipped laboratories, transport facilities, patients groups and strong village communities which are active in prevention.

From this year, SolidarMed will build on this foundation with the project «Muana» (which means children in the local language Macua) and specifically focus on children. Thanks to appropriate medication, the transmission of HIV to newborns will be prevented even more effectively. Early enough, adolescent girls will receive sexual health education to ensure that they are aware of the danger of the virus even before their first pregnancy. This way, many children will be spared Aids.



Chiredzi receives help

Zimbabwe: The many years of political crisis are causing increasing suffering, especially for the rural population. Hospitals outside of urban areas receive only minimal support, they lack doctors and there are regular power or water cuts.



Tanzania:
Fresh air against bats

Zimbabwe:
Chiredzi receives help

Moçambique:
No HIV in children!



Photo: Maurice Haas



«Settling your estate is a very personal subject, but also a very important one.»

Eliane Jenny, Fundraising

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A will provides clarity.

For many people, it is very important to continue helping the ill and the needy in developing countries, even beyond their own lifespan.

To do some lasting good, you can continue to support projects as you did in your lifetime by considering a relief organisation in your will. SolidarMed sees bequests of this nature as a sign of particular trust, for which we are very grateful. Thanks to the far-sightedness of our donors and their generous support, we can continue our projects in Africa and remain a reliable partner for remote hospitals and health centres.

In our society, the finiteness of life is often tabooed and so it is not surprising that only very few people write a will in their lifetime. But this particular issue should be handled in a deliberate way to ensure your estate is divided according to your own wishes. Without a will, the statutory inheritance distribution does not always conform to the wishes of the deceased.

So it is advisable to think about this in your «good days». As it is possible to consider relief organisations like SolidarMed in a will, we have prepared an information folder to give clarity on this subject.

If you have questions about this very personal subject, I would be glad to help – confidentially, and without obligation.

Contact Eliane Jenny to order our information pack «Legacies and Wills».

90 years of SolidarMed



Photo: SolidarMed

In the year 1926, Swiss doctors, dentists, pharmacists and medical students founded the «Swiss catholic association for missionary medical care». They realised that the colonial powers of the day cared too little about the medical needs

of the indigenous population in the distant countries. Since then, countless medical doctors and public health experts have provided valuable help for the poor population. Now, 90 years later, both the world and the association – which has been called SolidarMed since 1987 – have changed. Today, SolidarMed stands for modern development cooperation and partnership in five programme countries in the poorest region of the world.

There is still a lot for SolidarMed to do. Nevertheless, we look forward to raising a toast to our 90th anniversary on the 21st of May 2016. All members are cordially invited!

More information

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Valuable sponsors

To have long term impact, health projects in Africa need time and patience. SolidarMed sets up the necessary structures to allow partner hospitals and health centres to offer better medical



Photo: Marten Brit

care. This requires commitment over many years. In order to realise sustainable improvements, SolidarMed commits itself to partnership with local organisations, hospitals and village communities over a number of years.

Sponsors are particularly valuable supporters for SolidarMed's projects. Their regular commitment makes it possible for SolidarMed to implement ambitious and more effective projects. Become a sponsor and partner with an annual donation of 120 Swiss Francs. Many thanks!

More information

www.solidarmed.ch > Get involved