



ELIZABETH MOLYNEUX

UK/MALAWI

Dr. Elizabeth Molyneux is an Emeritus Professor of Paediatrics, and former Head of Department at the Kamuzu University of Health Sciences in Blantyre, Malawi. She first went to Malawi in 1974, and has lived and worked in Malawi for over 33 years. She only spent 10 years back in Liverpool, UK, in the 1980s where she worked in oncology and became clinical director of the Emergency Department at Alder Hey (the Royal Liverpool Children's Hospital). She is a jack-of-all-trades and has been privileged to be a founder of the Advanced Paediatric Life Support Course in UK and the Emergency Triage Assessment and Treatment course for WHO. In the Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital, Blantyre, she developed the Emergency Unit and Kangaroo Mother Care Unit and was instrumental in starting oncology and palliative care services for children (the latter was first in Africa). She continues to visit the Blantyre Oncology Department and more recently, she is on the Neonatal Essential Solutions and Technology team working with governments in five African countries to reduce neonatal mortality. Her research interests are wide and include infectious diseases, 'tropical' oncology,

*"Keep it simple,
do the basics well,
enjoy your work
and enjoy your
colleagues."*

emergency care, health care delivery and health care systems. She has undertaken several therapeutic trials including in oncology. She is humbled to have received several honours including the Order of the British Empire (an honour given by Queen Elizabeth II) for services to children in Malawi.

On Relationships that Influenced My Career

I was brought up in India in a missionary family. My mother was a doctor and my father was an Anglican priest. We lived on a mission compound and I was surrounded by 'Aunts' and 'Uncles' who worked in the nearby hospital. At the age of five, I was thrilled watching my mother come back home from operating and being half-scared, half-excited by her stories. One of the Aunts let me count pills in the pharmacy and I declared that I wanted to be a doctor when I grew up. My committed, principled, duty-driven and very kind mother had a huge influence on me. I want(ed) to be like her.

Many colleagues have influenced me both in what I do and how I work. John Martin in Alder Hey, Liverpool, took me into his Department when I knew very little and gave me space and opportunity to learn. Grace Malenga in Malawi is my professional sister – we have together shared medical highs and deep medical sorrows. And, of course, my husband Malcolm, who was born and brought up in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo and who hitchhiked through Malawi as a student and shared his love of Africa, especially of Malawi, with me.

On Challenges and Overcoming Them

To be honest, I never had any real challenges in my career. At one time, a form used to be sent round by HR asking about our career ambitions and I always wrote that I had none! I had 4 children, they always came first and so I was just glad to work. I learned to enjoy whatever I did and never thought that I would get very far up any career ladder. Serendipity has been my friend.

On Balancing Career and Other Life Responsibilities

We have 4 children, all close in age (at one time all 4 were under 6 yrs). I went part time for several years and learned to accept that I would not be privy to everything going on in our Department. My colleague Anke Borgstein was gracious in the duties that I took on. Anke had had 7 children herself so understood how pulled one can be in several directions. In time, we had a nanny who lived with us which made a huge difference.

After 10 years in Malawi, Malcolm was restless. He felt he wasn't doing any good (despite my protestations) and wanted to build academic relations with a university in UK. We came to Liverpool and I was not at all sure what I would do. After a couple of years of doing odd locums and part time, I was asked to apply as a Consultant to A&E. This meant doing the membership which I had missed in all our travels, I passed and was appointed. Six years later, it was clear that we should return to Malawi for Malcolm to start the Malawi Liverpool Wellcome Labs; again, I was unsure of my role but was appointed to my old Department and found all that I had learned in Liverpool was immensely useful in Blantyre. Challenges often turn into successes.

My Words of Wisdom for the Next Generation of Female Leaders

To my 25 year-old self, I would say "knuckle down and get all the exams and certificates you need as soon as possible. Then you don't have to worry about them later."

To young professionals, especially the ladies, I would say, "enjoy your work and enjoy your family. If it takes you a bit longer to become a consultant - so what? If you clearly enjoy your work, your seniors will do their best to help you; don't give the impression that you are simply doing a job as a stepping-stone to something better and brighter. Enjoy each step of the way and don't be afraid to take the odd career risk."