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Supporter Number: 1001682

Dear Congregation,

Thank you so much for your kind donation of £1,182.90 to Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF); your support means we can provide medical aid where it is needed most.

***"Emergency in maternity!"***

The call pierces an otherwise silent period on the MSF radio. I head towards the ward, uncertain what I'll find. Anything is possible in Old Fangak...

Old Fangak is 500 km north of Juba, the capital of South Sudan. It's a swamp region with a population of around 50,000. There aren't any roads to Old Fangak. During the rainy season, when the runway turns to mud, three helicopter flights and a boat trip are required to travel here from the capital. I work at the small MSF hospital here, and today it is raining.

Arriving at the maternity ward, I see the midwife has blood on her shoes. This isn't wholly unusual, but I can read from her facial expression that the situation is serious. The patient has given birth to a healthy baby girl. However, there have been complications and she is now haemorrhaging. There's a river of blood flowing over the front of the bed, only partially captured by a nearly full bucket below. Within a moment of my arrival, the patient loses consciousness.

Crammed into the tiny delivery room, where the temperature must be approaching 40°C, sweat is pouring from all the staff, their safety glasses fogging up. We squeeze fluid into drips in each of the patient's arms and I start her on a potent medication that raises blood pressure. Within 10 minutes, the patient starts to groan. She is regaining consciousness. I call her *Nyame*. (Nyame is not her real name, but a polite form of address in the local language, Nuer.)

Nyame's condition requires surgical support. We don't have those facilities in Old Fangak, so we immediately begin the process to transfer her to another hospital. In the meantime, Nyame desperately needs blood. I gather all of her family members together and explain that Nyame is in a critical condition. They tell me that she has five children. If she doesn't survive, what will their future be? Rapidly I tell the family we need blood donors and, out of the many volunteers, we find three with matching blood types.



A four-month-old girl, Nyapa, has her pulse checked by an MSF doctor at Old Fangak hospital, South Sudan.

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Throughout the night I stay with Nyame. Her family camps in the same room. Nobody sleeps. At the same time, a team works to find a way to get her the surgery she desperately needs. But the runway is consumed by mud and, with planes unable to land, options are limited.

As dawn breaks, we still don't have an answer. I check the clock and realise that I've been in the hospital for 26 hours and with Nyame for 18 hours. I hand over to another MSF doctor and take some rest.

I wake to learn that Nyame's haemoglobin levels are falling. There's no visible bleeding, so we do an ultrasound. Nyame is haemorrhaging into her uterus. We are now close to 24 hours post-delivery. I update the family and explain that there's a high chance that Nyame will not survive, but that we will not stop treating her.


As the sun starts to set, we hear the most amazing news. Another humanitarian aid organisation will provide a helicopter to transport Nyame to Juba. In Juba, MSF will arrange and fund the surgical care. I cannot even begin to express my gratitude. There aren't exactly spare helicopters in South Sudan. The earliest the helicopter can arrive is midday tomorrow. We have no more blood for Nyame, but we have hope on our side.

The next day, the helicopter is waiting. I rig up a makeshift pole so we can continue to provide her with intravenous fluid and make final adjustments to the infusions. Around 30 people are gathered outside the maternity ward, everyone wanting to offer a hand. We all watch as the aircraft rises and flies towards the horizon.

Over the coming days, we frequently refresh our emails, eagerly awaiting an update. Eventually we learn that Nyame is recovering well. She is expected to return to Old Fangak in the coming week.

Nyame is alive and her children still have their mother because of the commitment, passion and generosity of many. Thank you for supporting MSF and showing this same commitment, passion and generosity, which will help us save even more lives.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Niccol". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath.

Dr Tom Niccol  
MSF doctor