

In this month's article Eyston Vaughan-Huxley describes an outstanding and resourceful individual, Oluyombo 'Yombo' Awojobi, who has been running a clinic in rural Nigeria for the past 20 years. Yombo's single-handed practice, providing much-needed healthcare for the local population, was an inspiration to Eyston when he visited two weeks prior to beginning core surgical training.

Bijan Modarai  
Series Editor

We welcome original articles for the Trainees' Forum on any subject of interest to surgical trainees (maximum 1,500 words). We will also consider letters commenting on articles published in the Trainees' Forum. Please email submissions to [bulletin@rcseng.ac.uk](mailto:bulletin@rcseng.ac.uk).

*Ann R Coll Surg Engl (Suppl)* 2012; **94**: 108–110

## A remarkable surgical training opportunity in Nigeria

Eyston Vaughan-Huxley Barts and the London NHS Trust

Awojobi Clinic is a hospital deep in rural Nigeria. I visited for two weeks before starting my core surgical training in London, as part of a team led by Professor Andrew Kingsnorth from Derriford Hospital in Plymouth, representing the charity Operation Hernia, which aims to treat and teach groin hernia surgery in Africa.

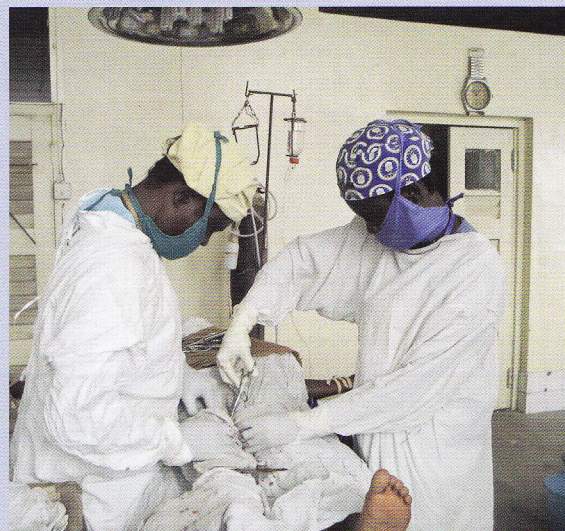
Nigeria is a country that has had its troubles. Ravaged by civil war, military rule and *coups d'état*, the country eventually achieved democracy in 1999. Despite this, the damage to its infrastructure is still very apparent more than ten years later. Reportedly, corruption is still rife, national grid electricity for more than one day in a month is a luxury and no amount of cash can guarantee running water. Until the introduction of the mobile phone about five years ago this was a country where if you wanted to speak to someone, you simply had to go and find them.

In spite of all this, Awojobi Clinic in Eruwa (ACE) is an incredible pocket of success where the sick know they will be treated well and where, as a trainee, I learnt a huge amount about rural surgery, Nigeria and its people.

ACE was set up over 20 years ago by a Nigerian consultant surgeon, Oluyombo

'Yombo' Awojobi. He was trained at the University College Hospital, Ibadan, Nigeria, where he graduated with a distinction in surgery. After a period of time spent working in the government healthcare system, Yombo became frustrated with its limitations and decided to go into practice on his own.

In establishing ACE, Yombo has overcome monumental challenges. Things that would be taken for granted in the UK presented serious obstacles – there was no electricity for six consecutive years, for instance, and a water supply provided only from buckets during its development. Yombo's achievements in creating ACE have been widely recognised and he is often invited to be a guest lecturer at universities and conferences. During his training and throughout his work he has been honoured with several awards, such as being one of two Nigerians listed in the World Medical Association's publication *Caring Physicians of the World*. With over 60 publications to his name, he has

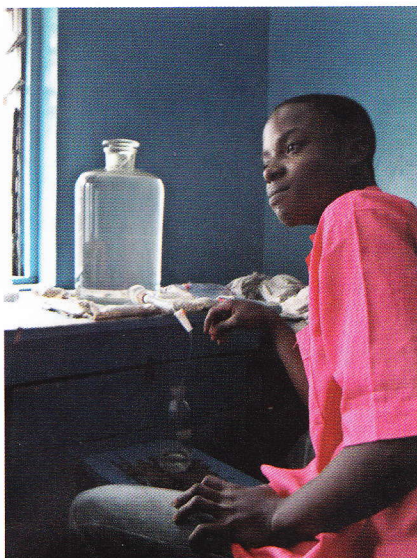


Oluyombo Awojobi assists his son, Ayodele, a third-year medical student

recently been recognised for service to his country and elected as a senior lecturer of bioengineering.

Perhaps what struck me most was the resourcefulness of the hospital. Yombo makes his own intravenous fluids, has constructed an autoclave that is fired by maize corn and fashions his own sutures. He has constructed his operating table from recycled car parts and he has even created, from the rear section of a bicycle, a centrifuge that spins blood samples to calculate haematocrit by pedalling – a device for which he has received several





A crucial step in the fluid-making process, overseen by a member of staff who had recently left secondary school

awards. Yombo has even found time to redesign entirely a cement mixer and recreate a car designed by his late brother, a professor of engineering, which allows the driver to progress through first, second, third and fourth gear while in reverse and a biogas plant that generates cooking gas from poultry droppings and cow dung. The hospital is designed to obtain as much natural light and ventilation as possible; this is so effective that the hospital's generator only uses one gallon of diesel a day.

Yombo recognises the need for technology in healthcare. The clinic has a radiology department, run by his wife Tinu, with one x-ray and one ultrasound machine. He has also purchased a machine that is able to cut materials into extremely thin slices, allowing him to make and set slides of tissue to be viewed under a microscope.

ACE employs about 30 people. Only a few of them have medical background, with the majority being secondary school leavers who work as healthcare assistants, physiotherapists, laboratory technicians and domestic staff. Yombo teaches them to be practical, resourceful and questioning. He is never upset to be woken in the middle of the night – his house is only a two-minute walk away.

Yombo is the only doctor working at ACE. Occasionally he has trainees and students who come to gain experience. His average day starts early, with a ward

round of about 40 inpatients. After that the day depends on who comes through the door. Often 70–80 patients will be in the clinic waiting room at the beginning of the day and he endeavours to see all those requiring his attention. Many of these patients will have travelled several hundreds of miles by whatever means, such is the reputation of the hospital. Many of them had never seen a white person before and there were mixed reactions of fascination, surprise and fear when they encountered me. I remember one small child who let out a fearful scream, ran and hid, and then cried every time I looked at him. The majority of people, however, embraced us all with open arms, huge smiles and offerings.

Operations are fitted around clinics, as are any medical emergencies, births, necessary repairs around the hospital and, if you are lucky, a history lesson or two from Yombo or a story from his past.

Despite being unbelievably busy, the Awojobis made enough time to look after me extremely well. They provided board and lodging, took me to places of interest and arranged for me to meet influential local people, such as the 'Oba', or king, of the region.

What a fantastic learning opportunity: one-on-one teaching with a consultant in pretty much all fields of medicine and

surgery, with a huge range of pathology, some extreme, all from a man who essentially built and runs a hospital from scratch. I struggle to think of more than three or four pathologies, or two or three procedures, that I saw more than once. Operations I saw and helped Yombo with in theatre included abdominal surgery, urology, gynaecology, orthopaedics and head and neck surgery. The true meaning of a general surgeon.

Yombo's teaching has been well received by his youngest son, Ayodele, who is currently a third-year medical student. However, it was in fact his fifth year at his medical school, as for two of the years the lecturers were on strike and Ayodele received no tuition. When not at university, Ayodele helps his father in ACE. As a result, his medical knowledge is vast and he is able to perform operations unassisted, including hernia repairs and Caesarean sections.

To put the achievements of Yombo and ACE into context, the nearest city, Ibadan, has a public teaching hospital with an estimated 2,000 beds. Yombo tells a story of a retired professor of surgery who, having been shot by armed robbers, attended A&E in this hospital to find there were no intravenous fluids. Were it not for a medical student who recognised the patient and was able to resource some fluids from a different hospital, he would



The operating theatre at Awojobi Clinic Eruwa. Surgeons Professor Kingsnorth and Mr Hanafy with Nicola Eardley, SpR, and Virginia Long, Scrub Nurse, at the operating table with local trainees





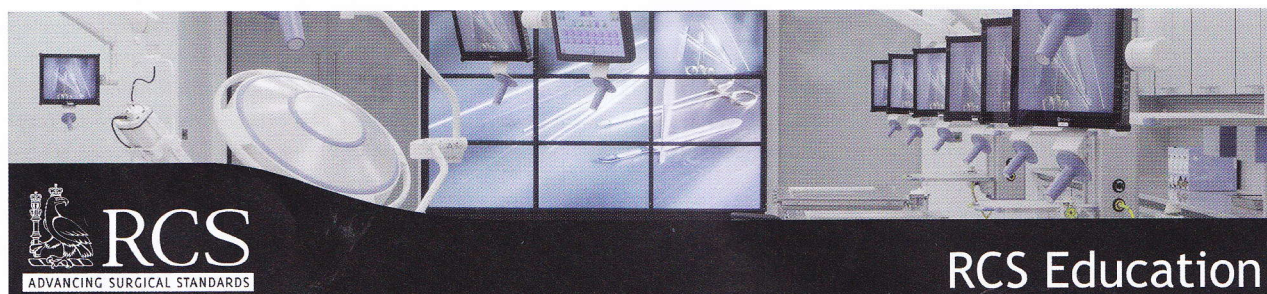
A surgical ward at Awojobi Clinic Eruwa

have died. Yombo asks: 'I have been making fluids for over 20 years at my own hospital, why can a government hospital of this size not do the same?'

I can tell that Yombo is immensely proud of his achievements and relishes the opportunity to share them with everyone who visits. He has made an enormous difference to the local people and has gained the respect of the many internationally renowned surgeons who have worked with him. Despite this, he remains unbelievably modest and realistic about his goals at ACE. He has a saying, which I believe is an adaptation of the *Serenity Prayer* written by American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr:

*'Have the courage to change the things you can, the serenity to accept the things you cannot and the wisdom to know the difference.'*

ACE is a happy place, a place that gives hope to those who have suffered so much for so many years. It is a lesson in human potential, initiative and resourcefulness, with a team lead by a man who will do anything for the benefit of his patients. From visiting ACE, I know I will be better doctor. I believe there isn't anyone, regardless of profession or stage of life, who would not learn something and benefit from spending time in Eruwa. ACE is a mentally, physically and medically demanding environment that will change you, challenge you and teach you many lessons in medicine, engineering and life.



### Legal Aspects of Surgical Practice

18 May 2012

This exciting one-day course is designed to meet the growing demand for surgically focused training in how to respond to many medico-legal issues. Participants will gain knowledge of clinical negligence, end-of-life issues, report writing, evidence giving and the coroner system.

**Fee:** £200

**Training level:** ST4–8 and consultant

### Neurosurgery week

28 May–1 June 2012

These hands-on cadaveric dissection and lecture-based courses are a unique opportunity for neurosurgeons to reinforce their anatomical knowledge of the brain and spinal cord through cadaveric dissections, lectures and tutorials.

The week comprises three modules: neurological anatomy, neuroradiology and approaches for intracranial surgery. You may attend some or all of the modules.

**Fee:** Please see website

**Training level:** ST3–8 and consultant

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