

Let me tell you about Monday, my first day working at St Luke's. I walk out of my house to a view of Malosa mountain tinged pink by the morning light and walk past the nursing school towards the hospital. As I approach maternity ward I can hear a strange musical wailing coming from just outside. As each mid-wife arrives for the handover the same question is asked – 'a woman has died?' And the reply – 'No, it was just a baby.' 'Oh, I thought it must be a mother with that crying.' And there is relief that a mother hasn't died but surprise that so much fuss is being made over a baby's death.

After hand-over I join Hanna, the senior medical officer for a short management meeting. The ambulances have been involved in accidents and need repair but it isn't clear if the insurance will cover. One needs a new radiator but apparently there aren't any in the country. 6 crates of gloves and fluids have been donated from Ireland and are at the airport but the cost of transporting them to hospital is quoted as 47,000 kwacha, about £175, which can't be afforded so an alternative must be found.

Then the clinicians meet to discuss cases: an 8 year old boy who was killed in a road traffic accident, people with chest infections that aren't improving so need testing for TB and HIV, people with known HIV and TB who have died. There is a lot of death. And then an argument about whether morning tea can still be provided for the clinicians because there isn't enough money in the budget. The argument runs on and the meeting ends late, after 9 o'clock.

In the afternoon I join Hanna on a visit to St Martin's, the sister hospital which is still managed by St Luke's. It lies in a stunning location on the lakeshore. They have 100 beds, an operating theatre and 2 months ago started an HIV treatment programme. The only doctor is on holiday for 3 weeks so the place is being run by one clinical officer, supported by 10 nurses and 2 medical assistants. A new clinical officer should have started last month but there is no house for him. We are there with someone who works for a trust that may give money for 2 houses to be built. Hanna seems to spend half her time writing proposals for money. We drive back the scenic route from St Martin's, up the escarpment with views back over the lake, sparkling in the sun. And down the other side, passing women wrapped in brightly patterned cloth with babies on their backs and buckets on their heads. Children in uniform returning from school, and men pushing loaded bicycles. The ground reddens and the shadows lengthen as the golden evening light spreads over the plain.