

Jariatu's Story

"My name is Jariatu Sesay and I come from Sierra Leone, West Africa. I was brought up in the countryside where there were few clinics and doctors and I saw people in my community die from illnesses which could be treated.

When I was very young I decided that I wanted to become a nurse. After doing well at secondary school, I applied to nursing school in the capital, Freetown. In Sierra Leone we have to pay for nursing training and my elder sister, who worked at a college training teachers, offered to pay for my training.

I began my nursing training at a time when Sierra Leone was involved in a terrible war. The nursing school closed down many times and nurses were often called upon to treat people hurt in the fighting.



I became a nurse at a hospital in Freetown as soon as I passed the exams. There were almost no medicines or equipment at the hospital where I worked. Patients were given a prescription and then their families had to go down to the local chemist to buy the medicines they needed for treatment. Patients also brought their own bedding and their families brought food in every day. If people did not have the money to

buy medicines then they could not be treated.

Doctors and nurses at the hospital received their salaries very late from the government, usually 3-6 months behind in payment. This made it very difficult for staff to get to the hospital to work as they had no money for bus fares and often had to walk long distances from their homes outside Freetown. Often there were not enough nurses on the ward as they had not managed to get to work. But I enjoyed my job and tried to be reliable as I knew that my patients depended on me.

Then something happened that made me think very hard about my life. A big mobile hospital ship docked in Freetown to carry out emergency surgery for people in Sierra Leone. I volunteered to work on the ship for a couple of months. My volunteer expenses for this work were more than my previous salary had been.

After I had finished this work, I went back to the hospital, but things had got even worse. It was so bad that I had to wait a whole year before I was paid! Can you imagine how hard life was for me and my family during this time? I had to support myself, as well as my mother and my nieces and nephews. Many of my friends at the hospital stopped coming to work completely, as they had to look for other paid work to feed their families.

Then I heard from colleagues that there was a shortage of qualified nurses in the UK and that I could earn a good salary there. I looked on the internet for more information and decided to apply to come to work in the UK. I was successful! I left Sierra Leone at the end of 2003 and started work in a London hospital as a nurse. It is so good to be in a hospital where there are medicines and the things you need to treat sick people.

However, life in London is not easy for me. I miss my home and family and I am lonely. I earn a lot more than I did whilst nursing in Sierra Leone and get paid on time. But I would not have considered leaving my home at all if I had been paid regularly, even though the amount of money was much smaller.



Sierra Leone is the poorest country in the world (UNDP 2004). The health service in the country is very weak; even non-existent in some areas. Many children die before reaching their fifth birthday and 2% of women die from problems related to childbirth.



Web links for further information:

BBC Country Profiles: Sierra Leone

A brief history and key statistics: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1061561.stm

BBC report: 'NHS 'taking away Africa's medics''

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/4349545.stm>

BBC report: 'Floating hospitals mercy missions'

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/4400381.stm>

BBC News World Edition

Top news stories from across Africa <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/default.stm>

All Africa

A site offering news from over one hundred newspapers and news agencies across Africa.

Sierra Leone pages: <http://allafrica.com/sierraleone>

One World Africa

The African arm of the One World independent media network; a network of people and groups working for human rights and sustainable development. <http://africa.oneworld.net/article/frontpage/151/509>

UNDP Human Development Reports

Human development indicators, searchable by country or indicators. <http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/>