

Ms Debbie Morgan

Assistant Director of Commissioning, Cambridge University Hospitals Finance Department



“Even through the language barrier, I learnt that a smile can go a long way”

Debbie Morgan is the assistant director of commissioning at the CUH finance department and a member of the Addenbrooke’s Abroad Advisory Group. She volunteered at Bwindi Community Hospital - in the Kanunga District of Uganda - in December 2008, as part of an Addenbrooke’s Abroad initiative. There she helped to play a leading role in the improvement of staff attitude and motivation and lent a helping hand where she could through the implementation of policies and procedures.

“I have a passion for travel and wanted to combine that with helping others. So my time spent at Bwindi Hospital was an incredible experience and one that has changed my attitude towards how I view my work and live my life. It was such a privilege to have lived and worked with the staff members and patients at the hospital. It’s made me realise that there are great opportunities for non-clinicians - a helping hand in all healthcare areas can go a very long way”.

While Debbie was volunteering at Bwindi Hospital she gained real insight into the lives of the staff members and the patients there. The Hospital itself looks after 35,000 people in the Kanunga District with about 50 babies being born each month. There are also serious issues like malnutrition, malaria, HIV, TB, diarrhea and limited resources that the 80 staff members working at the hospital are faced with on a daily basis. This puts them under extreme pressure and understandably a lot of them suffer from exceptionally low morale and lack of motivation because of it.

"I worked initially with the hospital to implement human resources and administration policies and procedures, but I soon realised that I needed to focus more on staff morale and motivation. I felt that this was an area that needed attention and where I could make the biggest impact. So I went about setting up a workshop with the staff and asked them simple questions about how they were feeling – something that they had never done before. We talked about what they liked, what they didn't like and what could be done differently. They shared their problems and some of the points raised were similar to issues we face in the UK - like the importance of good communication, valuing staff and patients, embracing change, better training and development etc. All areas that I felt I could add some real insight and value to.

After assessing their situation I put together a work plan for the year ahead and made a few recommendations on how to implement immediate changes. Everyone seemed to be happy with the improvements and staff were really grateful that they'd been able to participate in the workshop.

I believe that through administrative roles you can make a huge difference to the lives of the people you meet. There is so much work to be done in the way of putting systems and procedures in place in remote rural hospitals like Bwindi. I highly recommend volunteering to anyone who has any skills within the healthcare sector – it will change your outlook and your life. It did mine".

"In rural hospitals staff members have to be far more creative when it comes to using resources – it was a useful learning tool for me and a privilege to see"