

Esther- The cancer patient who beat all odds

The latest star in the TLM inspirational story series will certainly warm your heart.

This is Esther. She is now 20 years old and is an old friend of the children's oncology service and TLM. She is from a place called Sengerema which is a small town on the edge of Lake Victoria in the far north west of Tanzania.

She presented to the local District hospital at the age of 13 years (where the unstoppable Sr Marie Jose manages the entire hospital) about 7 years ago with a very large abdominal swelling. The investigations TLM supported confirmed that she had a cancer called a germ cell tumour. As Sengerema Hospital is one of our partner sites it was possible to give her first line TLM chemotherapy locally. However, after 6 cycles of treatment, which took 6 months to complete, sadly she still had significant disease.

At this point we decided to move her to Muhimbili National Hospital in Dar es Salaam as the second-line treatment is a whole lot tougher. TLM supported her travel across the country. She then spent 3 months living with us on Upendo Ward receiving chemotherapy that made her miserable but really didn't do much to reduce the size of her tumour – which we found to our dismay, had also spread to her liver. We decided there was little point in completing this treatment. We had no third line option.

We sat with Esther and her mother and explained that the IV chemotherapy was not working. We are gentle during these discussions but Esther understood what we were saying. We offered her palliative chemotherapy tablets, a small dose of gentle chemo that is taken every day as long as it helps, has no bad side effects and hopefully will slow the progress of her disease. They accepted this bleak news quietly and we transported her back to Sengerema for palliative care.

Well! That was 5 years ago.

We really couldn't believe what happened next. Esther was followed regularly by Sr Marie Jose. And the tumours slowly but steadily responding to the gentle chemo to the point that



now, quite remarkably, there is no disease anywhere to find – including her liver which is also completely clear of cancer. We've even stopped the tablets – shocked but delighted that hopefully she is cured.

And then..... late last year Esther arrived to clinic with a new tummy swelling – but this time it was the ultimate beautiful surprise - a cherished baby girl was born in April,

healthy and strong, with of course, Sr Marie Jose in attendance.

At TLM we never stop caring for our patients – even when the future looks bleak and cure seems impossible – we will follow and support all our patients to the end, focusing on giving each child the very best day possible no matter the circumstance and sometimes we are rewarded with the most delightful miracles.