



This is the lens through which Doctors with Africa CUAMM's Covid-19-related interventions should be viewed. We have signed new agreements with the United Nations Humanitarian Response Depot (UNHRD); thanks to this partnership, CUAMM will now not only have access to warehouses in Brindisi, Dubai and Accra to stock our own materials and facilitate the logistics of dispatching them to the field, but will also be able to obtain basic necessities (tents, personal protective equipment and so on) using more efficient procurement procedures endorsed by the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO). Another important step is our agreement with the World Food Program which, thanks to its network of humanitarian flights, enables CUAMM staff to travel inside Africa despite the suspension of commercial flights. These agreements will remain operative even after the Covid-19 crisis comes to an end. In the field, our goal is to secure the 23 hospitals where we are active and to train their staff, especially in infection prevention and control (IPC); to support community awareness-raising activities; to ensure the continuity of primary health services to the greatest extent possible; and, finally, to provide the country's ministries with technical assistance for the development of guidelines, protocols and flowcharts. We have also launched new lines of research.

Given the challenges that Covid-19 and other potential crises will continue to bring to us and the African communities we work with, these are important steps towards increased transparency and efficiency.

Things have rarely been as uncertain, and possible options as unclear, as they are today, so a great deal of humility and a healthy dose of realism are called for. But the challenge must be met head on; the core of our profession, CUAMM's very calling, is to be at our African partners' sides so they will not have to face this umpteenth challenge unaided.

## IN SOUTH SUDAN

In South Sudan, whose human development index value positions it at 187 out of 189 countries and territories, the Covid-19 pandemic is “a crisis on top of a crisis”.

TEXT BY / CHIARA SCANAGATTA / DOCTORS WITH AFRICA CUAMM

As of 21 June 2020, the number of confirmed cases had reached 1,892, although given the limited number of tests administered (10,038) the actual figure is likely higher. With a dearth of specialized medical and personal protective equipment, qualified staff, and the infrastructure necessary to ensure adequate hygiene standards, the country's health system is unable to provide the services needed or to prevent health facilities from becoming the centers of new outbreaks. Due to the population's failure to adhere to necessary preventive behaviors and the growing social stigma associated with the disease, it is impracticable to ask those with asymptomatic or mild cases of the disease to manage their illness at home. Routine health service supply and demand are also at risk; concerns about this new disease coupled with reduced mobility and limited financial resources are negatively affecting access to and use of non-Covid-19-related services. The principal pandemic response center in South Sudan is Rumbek State Hospital, where infection prevention and control measures such as waste management, hand-washing and toilet use have all been bolstered. Hospital staff have been trained on Covid-19 identification and prevention, and supplied with basic protective materials. A 15/20-bed-capacity isolation area has been set up and equipped with oxygen concentrators, pulse oximeters and Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) machines, and a triage system adopted; everyone who arrives for outpatient services is checked at the hospital's entrance. In the first 40 days, 10,723 individuals were examined; 886 of them were then assessed more thoroughly, and 663 went on to have a checkup with a doctor. Four of the latter were tested for the virus, with the swabs being sent to Juba. Since no community isolation and control system was yet in place, the patients were kept in isolation inside the hospital while waiting for their results. In a month's time, nine such cases (5 confirmed and 4 suspected) were found. The next step will be to certify the hospital's laboratory to do its own testing using the GeneXpert system that has recently been enabled for Covid-19 testing and is already being used in the HIV/TB division. CUAMM also supports the Covid-19 response strategy through non-clinical activities such as community awareness-raising via radio broadcast and the training of staff in primary health facilities, both public and private, and of village health workers. Finally, the data gathered during screening and in the isolation unit are valuable sources of information for health authorities as they seek to get an idea of the local situation of the pandemic in order to address it as effectively as possible.