



Nanorò: We, too are here!

Yes...“We, too are here!”...that is just what seem to be telling us all the actors of this wonderful human experience set in Nanorò, 100km away from the capital of Burkina Faso and in particular at the CMA, “Centre Medical avec Antenne Chirurgicale”, the hospital founded by the Camillian religious. Which represents a real paradise for all the inhabitants of the district (more than 150.000) and well beyond (crowds also from neighbour countries such as The Ivory Coast, Niger and Mali) for the excellent reputation of its doctors and of the facility that is expanding from one year to another.

“We, too are here ” because these people seem to claim their right to health a normal thing, something taken for granted in our part of the world. They claim their right but without protest, on the contrary, with the humbleness and willingness to accept any treatment the hospital can offer them, fighting hard against suffering and illnesses and with an eternal gratitude. Let’s not forget that in that country a national healthcare system does not exist; patients, adults, the elderly and children have to pay for medical treatment. It seems a paradox but it is true, a country where absolute poverty reigns, every individual has to cover not only their own medical expenses, but also those of any needy relative, saving every penny for a rainy day, this is the only way to survive. However difficult it may seem they are content because they realize that they have been offered a chance that they hadn’t had in the past. Before there was the local witch doctor, or they were simply left to die, hence the paradise which, I mentioned earlier, the chance to recover from an illness and therefore to be able to go on in life.

At the other end are the doctors, nurses, assistants (as we call them) the Camillian religious.

The hospital of Nanorò was founded by the Camillian religious, in 1990 a dispensary then in 2000, it became a proper hospital, in patient wards were rebuilt, an operating block, day hospital, blood test laboratories and an x-ray ward., in a very short time, and is now expanding

rapidly. The presence of a centre in the forefront for the study of a vaccination against swamp fever, which has reached its 3rd phase meaning it has been experimented on the locals, has marked another great turning point: the installation of electricity inside the hospital.

The Camillians whose present director and surgeon is Father Henry Nietema and Father Sorgu, director general, administer the hospital, the government can not provide public health assistance therefore is happy to favour any initiative that aids their people.

However, to be honest, the best feature of this hospital is the surgery ward, strongly desired by the Camillians who built it from scratch. The hospital is run by Gino Capponi, a retired surgeon from Liguria who worked in Piemonte. He moved to Nanorò 8 years ago and since then has been totally devoted to his mission, never abandoning the project, which in the meantime has expanded incredibly. At the beginning only 200 operations were carried out per year, in 2009 the number reached 1200. The operations are carried out in all fields of medicine from operations of the abdomen, urology, orthopaedics, gynaecology, neurosurgery, paediatrics and sometimes even plastic surgery when necessary. All this thanks to Gino Capponi, and his extraordinary team of nurses and scrub nurses, who he himself has helped to grow professionally and who are endowed with a great sense of duty and dedication. Thanks to him, they have become capable of carrying out both minor operations such as hernias but also more important operations such as thyroids, prostates, in open-heart operation, uteruses, ect. Another group of nurses has specialized in administering anaesthesia, after stages with Italian specialists who Capponi brought over to Nanorò and hosted personally. They have become capable of administering both general anaesthesia and spinal in children and the elderly; an efficient team that has had excellent results both in terms of quality and quantity. I was surprised to see such long waiting lists in surgery, in two weeks I saw other than routine work, some difficult cases: cystectomy for cancer of the bladder



penetrating into the vagina and the ileum, k of the low rectum, intestinal occlusions of parasitic nature, peritonitis caused by perforations during typhus, others during meningitis, neoformation of maxilla bones, jaundice caused by lithiasis of VBP, meningocele, osteitis, ect.

It goes without saying that all these operations are not followed up by intensive therapy or reanimation as would have been in our hospitals, yet I have not seen so far, any complications that would have been foreseen with our parameters.

Gino has his living quarters within the hospital walls, where he spends his entire days.

He is always present with his persistent sense of fraternity and sympathy. He is responsible for having created and consolidated some important relationships with Italian universities as in paediatrics; the ward is well equipped with 16 beds and is in partnership with a CREM service, which deals with infant malnutrition. The service is run by the post graduate school of paediatrics at the Mayer in Florence, with medical staff in turns with post graduate students of the last year, who live in Nanorò for 4 months, and with collaboration the Unit of Gastroenterology of the hospital of Careggi in Florence that has organized and made operative a service of diagnostic also in outpatient ambulatory with the support of video endoscopy, doctors staff specialized in endoscopy and nurses whose role is too train local staff.

The hospital unfortunately lacks local surgeons, there is no good reason for them to come to Nanorò, first of all they would be underpaid and secondly because they prefer to remain in their own city (Ouaga o Bobo Diulasso).

Our association has played a distinguishing role in this project thanks to the sensitivity demonstrated by our past president Filippo la

Torre who established an excellent relationship with the Camillian religious after several stays there, the result being an activity of coordination of colleagues willing to guarantee a continuous and reliable presence in Nanorò, stays of 2 or 3 weeks are the minimum necessary to obtain this result, to understand the basic mechanisms and to allow integration.

Living quarters are comfortable and are offered by the Camillians in a building adjacent the hospital entirely at the disposal of volunteers. As mentioned at the beginning local people live in order to survive owing to the lack of any future projects, this is how this hospital instead, for all the reasons described above, represents some ambitious projects that however given the results so far, should be carried out with persistence. We all can do something even something small but concrete, if we want.

The relationship between staff and patients is based on warmth and hospitality and the more people are welcomed here, the more arrive. Offering them assistance can be very easy.

After all, those are the ideal conditions to rediscover the real inspiration of our engagement, other than the need to keep pace with the frenetic and irrational working day, the troubles of our authorities, and of our own society... our profession is at the service of who real need it (because without it often there wouldn't be any other alternative but death) so it is extremely evident that our help is really precious and therefore worthwhile .

Alessandro Testa



Gino with a young patient with no hope of being able to walk again, because of a neoformation of her leg, here you can see her standing after the operation.



Gino Capponi, practically the ward of Surgery is continuously looking for solutions to many problems, so far many solutions have been given, many results have been obtained, but The main concern is for the future.



How can you resist these eyes?



Every meeting is an occasion of joy and celebration for all children!



Father Henri Nietema, Sanitary director and young surgeon, who graduated at the University "Cattolica" in Rome. He is a person of great humanity and professionalism.



The operating theatre is sufficiently equipped to carry out all the operations on the waiting list.



Doctors (surgeons, scrub nurses), work on shifts from 8 am to 6pm. The atmosphere is always relaxed and cordial.



All patients buy their own medicines and aids necessary for their stay in hospital. If they can't afford to, there is always someone who will offer to pay for them! (either relatives or even Gino, or the Camillian community)



Every occasion is good one to exchange views, to listen to some of Gino's stories, after all he is a memorable presence in the hospital of Nanorò.



A smile is often the only means to express gratitude, even if at times it is We, doctors who should express our gratitude to these people for the experience that has enriched us, and increased the desire to be able to continue offering help!



There's no stopping: it's not easy to reconcile surgery with activities regarding organisation. But necessity makes virtue, and Gino has been there for eight years.



Here you can see the extraordinary musketeers of the surgical ward of Nanorò: other than myself and my colleague from Florence, Dr Manetti, do not appear other doctors, but some capable surgeons and anaesthetists.