

ACG NORTH AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL GI TRAINING GRANT

By Dora Huang, MD

I WAS FORTUNATE TO TRAVEL TO RWANDA as part of the ACG North American International GI Training Grant. My original trip, planned to coincide with Rwanda Endoscopy Week (REW) and scheduled for November 2024, was delayed given the outbreak of Marburg virus in the country. Rwanda's swift and successful response to the virus was exemplary, a demonstration of the growing capacity of the region, and REW was rescheduled for March 2025. Unfortunately, given an Ebola outbreak in Uganda, I was then unable to return to Mbarara for the second portion of my trip, though I have continued to work remotely.

I started my trip in Kigali, where I met with many of the GI clinicians and educators who have been partnering with REW and GI Rising over the past 10 years. Their services stretched throughout the city, from the academic University Teaching Hospital of Kigali (CHUK) to the more private-based King Faisal Hospital, from the new Rwanda Military Hospital to the Charite Digestive Charity Clinic, the base of GI Rising's operations. The impact of GI Rising on GI subspeciality care in Kigali cannot be overstated.

While in Kigali, we were able to observe clinic and endoscopy, the latter quite different when compared with the United States or even Uganda the year prior. Documentation, availability of sedation, and cleaning techniques differed—patients' families were encouraged to record the endoscopy from a separate room, as patients' access to online or digital records varied, and support staff manually processed scopes. Each hospital or clinic offered a different level of service, for example, as it related to advanced technique, sedation availability, colonoscopy with prep, etc. With other attendings and fellows in Kigali, we delivered lectures and board review to current fellows and worked on the research arm of REW.

Our teams then dispersed to more than five different areas of the country, transporting rented scopes and supplies to set up endoscopy. With attending gastroenterologist Dr. Matt Smith, an endoscopy tech, and an emergency room nurse from the U.S., I traveled to Butaro, a hilly, green region in the north of Rwanda, closer to the Ugandan border. This was the second time a group from REW has visited this region, with the first time documented in a 2018 ACG MAGAZINE article by Katie Dunleavy, MB BCh BAO. Paired with the clinical director of Butaro Hospital and an operating room technician, we were given two empty rooms to open an endoscopy unit.

With one tower, some imported supplies, and four buckets used to manually clean each scope,









we completed more than 100 endoscopies—the large majority unsedated—and diagnosed gastric and colon cancers, recommended treatments for inflammation, and attempted to reassure worried patients. It changed my perspective on our "typical" requirements for anesthesia, nursing, and support staff. Across all the sites, the teams completed over 750 scopes, the impact of which is still being measured.

I hope to continue working with the research team at CHUK as they compile and analyze the data from this experience. Their IRB, which plans to look at patient outcomes after participating in these weeks, will quantify the impact of offering endoscopic care to the region, potentially encouraging more national and academic investment in GI subspecialty care.

My remote work in Uganda will also continue, as we work on our IRB to measure the impact of the newly formed GI clinic and endoscopy unit. Our work on characterizing patients diagnosed and treated with hepatocellular carcinoma is expanding as well.

I remain grateful for the partnerships that have formed across Boston and East Africa.



Dr. Huang is an attending gastroenterologist at the VA Pacific Islands Health Care System and completed her GI fellowship at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, MA.

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Department of Veterans Affairs or the United States government.



