

Edinburgh-based charity unveils ambitious expansion plans

As it announces its 5,000th successful operation, Edinburgh-based charity Kids Operating Room (KidsOR) has revealed shocking statistics on the preventable deaths of millions of children in low and middle-income countries (LMICs).

Despite great strides to reduce global child mortality, research shows that approximately 1.7 billion children with routinely treatable conditions lack access to safe, affordable surgical and anaesthesia care when needed, resulting in death or permanent disability. Astonishingly, more children aged between 5 and 14 die every year from surgically treatable injuries than from malaria, HIV and TB combined.

KidsOR exists to change the global plight of children denied lifesaving care. It has already launched four fully operating surgeries in Malawi, Rwanda, and two in Tanzania and has recently revealed plans to develop 15 more operating rooms by the end of 2019 in locations including Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Malawi and Central America.

A game-changer in the third sector, KidsOR provides dedicated, specialist facilities and equipment for children's surgery. The charity, funded by Scottish philanthropists Garreth and Nicola Wood, works with local surgeons and their teams to design and build Operating Rooms they can use to transform the care available to children in low and middle-income countries (LMICs).

Co-Founder and Chairman, Garreth Wood explains: "Access to surgery is a basic human right, but sadly there are still almost 2 billion children around the world who lack access to it. It is unacceptable that any child should die – or live

their life in agonising pain or disability – because of a surgically treatable condition. Nicola and I believe our work is not only the right thing to do but KidsOR is already proving that investment in surgical services for children is affordable, saves lives, and has long-term benefits for the economic growth of a country. We have already opened Operating Rooms in Malawi, two in Tanzania, and KidsOR is responsible for creating the first ever dedicated children’s Operating Room in Rwanda – a country with approximately 5.1 million children.”



KidsOR founder Garreth Wood

KidsOR CEO, David Cunningham, who co-authored a report with Yale University and Makerere University in Kampala, explains the impact one installation can have: “We reviewed access to children’s surgical care in Uganda where there are only 4 paediatric surgeons serving a population of over 20 million children under the age of 15 – a shortfall of nearly 200 paediatric surgeons. A single year’s activity in the one children’s Operating Room prevented an incredible 6,447 years

of disability and had a net economic benefit to the country of over \$5 million. In this case, that amounted to more than one hundred times the investment. In short, for an estimated \$6 a year a healthy life was granted to a child – and for just under \$400, a child's life was saved.

“We know KidsOR is an effective solution to not only saving lives, but to helping countries prosper. We have a long way to go, but we know we have a real solution and that, in time, we can put an end to the preventable disabilities and deaths of millions of children around the world.”

The charity's collaborative approach with local nations, leading humanitarian children's surgical organisations, such as the Global Initiative for Children's Surgery, and the world's leading academic institutions from Oxford to Yale, is also proving effective and the results are ground-breaking.

Professor Kokila Lakhoo, Chair of the Global Initiative on Children's Surgery and Consultant Paediatric Surgeon at the University of Oxford, praised the impact being made by KidsOR, and explains: “Working in partnership with local surgeons and providing them with real solutions to increase the number of children they can operate on is transforming children's lives across low and middle-income countries. In Tanzania, a three-year waiting list for elective surgery was wiped out in less than three months after a KidsOR installation. That's incredible and shows the model of finding where the paediatric surgeons are and investing in their infrastructure is definitely working.”

To ensure the impact of their work is measured, KidsOR collaborates with Yale Medical School to carry out assessments of their units. Working in partnership with the local hospitals, KidsOR records every single operation and looks at the wider impacts on the child, family and the economic benefit to a country or region. This ongoing research allows KidsOR to monitor long-term progress and to work with local

governments to advocate for the urgent need for investment in high quality, safe surgical services for children.

Leading the research collaboration, Dr Doruk Ozgediz, a paediatric surgeon at Yale University highlighted the unique opportunity KidsOR is providing for essential research stating: "The fact that these Operating Rooms are often the first in the country or allow the creation of a new service in a particular region, means they provide an incredible opportunity to assess their impact and learn lessons. The organisation also partners with local champions who are an inspiration and are true agents of change, and the results, are quite unbelievable."

KidsOR currently has surgical facilities in development stages in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Malawi, Uganda, Ethiopia, Zambia, Mozambique, Nepal, Central America and South East Asia. On-going advocates against the global plight of children denied safe access to surgery, the KidsOR team are also ambassadors for the numerous inspirational local providers they work with and the resilient families and communities at the heart of everything they do.