



Dr. Kondjela Sara Hamunyela

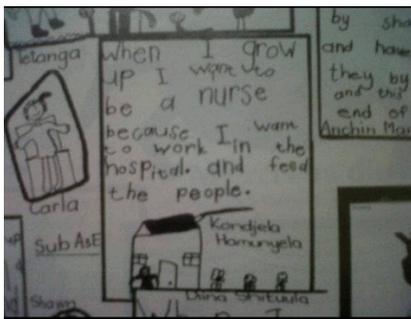
Born 8 March 1985 in Oranjemund Namibia.

Favorite memories of growing up

Oranjemund is a small diamond mining town in the south of Namibia, at the border of Namibia and South Africa, on weekends my Father would sometimes take the family fishing at the orange river, and then have a family barbeque at the Atlantic Ocean beach front.

When and how did you decide to become a doctor

I decided to pursue a career in medicine in my matric year of high school 2002 at the age of 17, I had a desire to do something were I could help serve other people and make a difference for our country. I would like share here a photo which was recently sent to me of a framed picture in the Library of Oranjemund Primary school. It is a small caption of preschool children writing about what they wanted to become when they grow older. For context I believe I was 6 years old when I wrote this. My parents tell me I wanted to work in a hospital and become a nurse at that age.



When and why you chose surgery

I fell in love with surgery during my third year of undergraduate training. I remember entering a surgical theatre for the first time and being amazed at the process involved in operating a patient. I remember distinctly observing the ecosystem of different roles in an operating theatre ranging from the nurses, anaesthetist and surgeon. I was so intrigued by the whole experience, I continued to follow up with the patient who was completely oblivious of the whole process in the OR while they were under anaesthesia, and eventually witnessing them being discharged home. I knew during that encounter that I wanted to be a part of that ecosystem in theatre.

Surgical specialty and favorite thing about it

I am a paediatric surgeon, for me surgery isn't just a job its about making a difference to children their family's lives' by offering a service which gives them a bit of hope in the health services of a resource limited country. My biggest reward is seeing a mothers' smile as they are discharged home with their child after lengthy surgeries and days spent stressing in the hospital. Their smile gives me the strength to continue offering that service to the next patient with as much if not more dedication.

Prior to me writing my first FC Paediatric surgery examination in Cape town south, there was no paediatric surgery department in the state sector in Namibia. There was definitely a need to have a paediatric surgeon in the state. All paediatric surgical cases were operate by the general surgeons, they were referred to the private sector or sent to South Africa for surgical management. I am honored to be a pioneer in helping to start the department and watching it grow as more consultants and medical officers join the department.

Memorable case/Patient/ Or story about taking care of a patient

During my post graduate training in South Africa, Prof Daniel Sidler was one of my training professors'. After telling him about Namibia not having a formal paediatric surgery department and sharing with him the long waiting list of children born with anorectal malformations who had colostomies placed at birth but still needed to have their anal reconstructions done he agreed to come to Namibia to assist in operating these patients. Some children were 10 years of age and still walking around with colostomies. Together with the help of the medical officers in the general surgery department at Windhoek Central hospital, another paediatric surgical trainee Dr Rengura, prof Sidler and myself, for two weeks we operated on a hand full of these patients. There was one particular 4-year-old female with an acquired rectovaginal fistula, who had a colostomy in-situ. Due to time constraints we never managed to operate on her. Her mother was very emotional and disappointed. I remember the team reassuring her we will keep her contact details and when I return after completion of my studies we will attempt to assist her if her paper work for referral to the private sector still wasn't sorted out by then.

2 years later upon returning form my studies, we managed to track this patient down, repair her fistula and eventually reverse her colostomy. This little girl and her mothers' emotional stress of thinking that her child will not get the surgical help she needed has helped inspire

me to continue working with my colleagues in growing the state pediatric surgery department.

Role model/biggest influence in your life

My faith in the God I serve and my Parents. My mother never had the privilege of finishing school. Despite not being able to speak English at that time, she continued to always motivate her children to do well in school. She kept reminding us that we were growing up in a different time in Namibia, where children with similar backgrounds like her could now go to school and pursue a tertiary education. She continued to encourage us to strive for what wasn't possible for her in the past.

Biggest supporter

My family and friends who are too many to mention individually, have always supported me emotionally on my journey and continue to encourage me. I have the privilege of having good mentors who even in times when I felt I wanted to give up they would wisely offer council and help in finding the strength to keep persevering.

Experience as a woman in surgery been so far

It definitely has been a challenging journey thus far. I believe many women can relate when I say choosing surgery, there is a fear of neglecting my social and family obligations. Trying to find a balance to equally build and nurture both is not an easy task especially in a country that is still evolving from the previous dogmatic cultural and societal norms.

Hopes/plans for the future

I hope to continue mentoring young trainees to pursue a career in pediatric surgery in-order to decentralize the services we offer in Windhoek and encourage the setting up of pediatric surgery departments in the regional hospitals.

I would also like to focus more on research and publications to scientifically document the pathology encountered in Namibia. There are very few publications on the demographics and experiences of pediatric surgical cases in our country.

I also have an interest in doing a fellowship in pediatric neonatal surgery.

Fun/leisure/hobbies

Personally, I enjoy traveling and camping.

Parting shot to young women who may be interested in surgery

There will be challenges encountered as with any career, going higher up the career path every female understands the additional pressures of life and the greater spectrum of responsibilities such as maternity leave, family and children. This glass ceiling for women in surgery proves to be a challenge.

We need to embracing this perceived ceiling as normal stages of our growth as a woman. With us networking, sharing our experiences with each other and through mentoring, this perceived glass ceiling can be shattered for future female surgeons.

Who you are and what surgery means to you.



This is a picture of me Supervising a junior medical officer Dr Tosca Mbeeli, in her first removal of a sacrococcygeal teratoma. (I am the one with the pink scrub hat).

Thank you for sharing you with us and inspiring the women around us!!