



[Above] Barrister Maryam Bukar giving out cervical cancer pamphlets and presenting to a group of women in Kaltungo Local Government, Gombe State



[Above] Harsana Showunmi (middle) with Kaltungo Rotary Members speaking to the women on the day of the screening event



[Above] Alvin Thompson, Nurse Hajara Ibrahim, Nurse Zainab Bappa, Maryam Bukar, Nurse Labiga Stephen, Harsana Showunmi, Nurse Happy Ayuba, Kolade Dairo (from left to right)

[Below] Attendees of the cervical cancer screening event with Rotary members from Columbia Town Center and Kaltungo Rotary Clubs present.



IN THE FIGHT AGAINST THE BIG C, IT TAKES A VILLAGE

By Ariama Long

It was the harmattan season in Nigeria. At the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja, two Rotarians, Harsana Showunmi and past-President Alvin Thompson from the Columbia Town Center Rotary Club, were welcomed, caught their ride and headed into town. They zipped through the occasional village among big homes and office buildings in the hazy afternoon and observed the bright colored vehicles and store fronts in the glistening sun.

This city, however, was not even close to the final stop on their journey. After retreating to the hotel near her brother-in-law, Kolade, Showunmi and the guys settled in for the night. Before sunrise they set out for Gombe state. It would be ten long hours later before the team would finally arrive at their destination.

Arriving in Kaltungo Local Government in Gombe, the team was there to attend the cervical cancer screening event, a major achievement of their international Cervical Cancer Education Project. This entire program and the screening event was the product of hard work and team collaboration initiated and

led by Columbia Town Center Rotary Club. Collaborations involved on-the-ground partnerships with the Kaltungo Rotary Club and Better Health Initiative for Women and Children Inc. (BHIWC Inc.) and additional financial support from Rotary District 7620 and Columbia-Patuxent Rotary Club.

The project started with cervical cancer prevention talks and presentations for over 600 women. It included the distribution of 1,000 informational pamphlets to the community. At the end of the two-day cervical cancer screening event, 150 Nigerian women were screened for this preventable disease, free of charge, at two separate health care centers in Gombe State.

Bukar, who was present for the event, noted that the women were happy, willing, eager, and grateful to the staff and volunteers for the screenings. "This sensitization program of cervical cancer, doing lectures for women, has impacted a lot of knowledge of what cervical cancer is, to all the women that attended the screening," said Barrister Maryam Bukar, BHIWC Chief Operating Officer and Rotarian member of Kaltungo Rotary Club.

May 2019, all results were in and 98.6 percent of the screening results are negative, rounding out the whole project on a positive note.

One woman went back to the hospital a follow-up pap smear in July and after confirming findings that the abnormal cells were precancerous, underwent a LEEP procedure to remove the cells. Bukar translated for the client as she spoke about her experience with the organization. "I really appreciated the help," said the patient, whose name has been omitted. "I am very happy. And may God increase the knowledge and the power of this organization to keep on doing this kind of program. I will continue to tell people about this program."

Education normalizes prevention through screening and combats any stigma there may be about female health issues. When we educate about the importance of cervical cancer screenings, awareness increases, costly treatments can be avoided and lives can be saved.