

# The Ngami Times

Maun, Botswana



Karen Moss (centre) with training team Steps'

## Clubfoot deformity treatment comes to Maun

By Edith Sebati

Residents of Ngamiland, who until now had to travel to Gaborone for clubfoot ponseti treatment, will soon bid farewell to such costly visits. This follows a two-day training seminar of select medical staff of Letsholathebe II Memorial Hospital to treat that condition in Maun.

Subsequently, a clubfoot ponseti treatment clinic will be established at Thuso Rehabilitation Centre in Maun to service the region.

A team of experts and doctors from Princess Marina Hospital in Gaborone, under the supervision of the STEPS Botswana Foundation, conducted clubfoot ponseti treatment training for staff of Letsholathebe II on Monday. The team for this week's seminar comprised doctors (surgeons), nurses and physiotherapists.

STEPS charity foundation founder and director, Karen Moss explained besides the benefit to high travel costs for patients from Ngamiland, the latest training initiative will also help decongest Princes Marina Hospital where most patients from across the country are referred to access the clubfoot Ponseti treatment.

Moss explained that STEPS Botswana Foundation was registered on November 2013 and signed a memorandum of agreement (MOA) with the Ministry of Health in May this year. Moss explained that the clubfoot Ponseti treatment can be done on new-borns, starting from two-week olds to children aging up to 5 years, but she encourages parents to do the treatment as early as possible because that way it is easier.

Moss said parents should give children born with this deformity a chance to be normal, as negligence is bad. She said Thuso Rehabilitation Centre has adults with clubfoot going for therapy, which is a result of initial negligence.

She revealed that at least 90 people from Botswana's population of slightly more than two million, are born with the deformity. Currently only three hospitals in Botswana will be able to treat the deformity and these are Letsholathebe II, Princess Marina, and Palapye Hospital.

She said the challenges encountered are relapse of the treatment, when parents stop bringing children to the hospital thinking that the child is alright without finishing the treatment. The treatment involves surgery of the tendon at the back of heel, straightening the foot with a cast and finally using brace shoes for at least four years. She said the reason that over 95% of children born with clubfoot can have fully functional feet is the gentle treatment pioneered by Dr Ignácio Ponseti. The success of the treatment is a story of dedicated doctors and proactive parents. Moss said Ponseti pioneered his method at the University of Iowa, United States, in the 1950s after researching the long-term effects of clubfoot surgery. She said his findings were that, in adulthood, patients who had been operated on often had feet with stiffness, pain, and limited mobility. She further said by studying the anatomy and functions of a baby's foot, he discovered why previous casting methods had been unsuccessful and started manipulating the foot differently. Ponseti's method involves a series of five to seven casts and a simple procedure to lengthen the heel cord that gradually moves the foot into normal alignment. She said for majority of patients, the Ponseti method is an outpatient procedure that does not require a hospital stay. Moss said some patients with more resistant clubfoot require more intervention, but for most, as Ponseti said: "Parents of infants born with clubfeet may be reassured that their baby, if otherwise normal, when treated by expert hands will have normal looking feet with normal function for all practical purposes. The well treated clubfoot is no handicap and is fully compatible with normal, active life."