Dear Friends of the Day One Project,

We write with happy news from Blantyre, Malawi where we have just reviewed the nearly final architectural plans for the new neonatal ward at Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital. The project has been approved by the Ministry of Health, architectural plans are expected to be finalized in two weeks, and construction bidding documents will go out this month. We expect to break ground in April just as the rainy season ends. Construction will take 6 – 7 months, so we are hopeful that the new unit will open by the end of 2014!

The new unit is designed to have 12 CPAP machines, with individual bassinettes for each baby and a place for mom to sit beside. Meanwhile, the QECH team is working hard in the current neonatal ward to deliver CPAP to all the premature babies in need. We wanted to share the wonderful story of one baby who received CPAP at QECH. The little boy pictured here, Chokonjetsa, was born weighing just over 2 pounds; he could breathe on his own, but because his lungs were immature it took nearly all his energy just to breathe. With the support of CPAP, he was able to grow and gain weight. After about two weeks of CPAP, he graduated to Kangaroo Mother Care, where skin-to-skin contact with his mother provided warmth. Hearing his mother’s heart beat and feeling her breathe helped him to regulate his own heart and respiratory rate. Chokonjetsa continued to improve and now, at 6 months of age, is thriving at home with his family!

Malawi has the highest rate of pre-term birth in the world. Most babies born too early in Malawi do not yet have access to this kind of lifesaving therapy. Indeed, little Chokonjetsa’s name was chosen by his grandmother because it means “the thrown away” and she feared that her grandson had been thrown away by God and would not survive being born so small. The expansion of the neonatal ward at Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital will help make sure that CPAP and other lifesaving technologies are available to all premature babies in Malawi.

On our trip, we had the chance to visit Bwaila Maternity Hospital, one of the first district hospitals in Malawi to implement CPAP. The introduction of CPAP at Bwaila has reduced mortality by 1.5-fold for premature babies with breathing difficulties. Our team is committed to making sure that the Day One project will support the development and translation of similar technologies to meet all the basic needs of newborn survival.

Rebecca Richards-Kortum Maria Oden Elizabeth Molyneux Neil Kennedy