

Bedford Orthopaedic Hospital, Umtata, South Africa

Bedford Hospital is situated in the heart of what was once known as the Transkei, the black homeland during the time of the apartheid.

It is a rural area of barren beauty with rolling, spartan meadows and dramatic coastline and is home to the Xhosa people. The hospital lies a few miles outside Umtata, a large town that was the capital of the Transkei.



The hospital provides orthopaedic care for 4 million people, sent in directly or via 16 district hospitals. The needs in the area are immense, with high rates of HIV and tuberculosis taking their toll on the population in addition to the severe motor vehicle accidents and occasional gunshot wounds.

The hospital has 150 beds within four wards, including a specialist spinal centre and a paediatric ward. For the past 20 years it has been run by Professor Chris McConnachie OBE, a Scottish orthopaedic surgeon who specialises in paediatric and spinal surgery.

An astonishing variety of pathology presents to the hospital. Spinal tuberculosis resulting in paraplegia is rife in both children and adults, chronic osteomyelitis, Ricketts, skeletal tumours as well as severe trauma are commonplace.

Three well equipped theatres are in use daily and the busy clinic functions as the outpatient department and 24 hour emergency department. Given the large

distances that are traveled to reach the hospital, often on unsealed tracks, patients may not present for several days despite severe, acute injuries.

