

Refreshment with a difference

Most were tired. Some had left young children with relatives or friends. A number were dependent on others to provide a temporary home base whilst in the UK, and many had a programme of deputation to fulfil. The course fee, though subsidised, was a heavy chunk out of their resources. So why did some 30 doctors, nurses and midwives, from many backgrounds and nationalities, with various degrees of training and experience, gather at Oak Hill College during June? They were attending Overseas Update, an annual course run by CMF and MMA HealthServe for healthcare professionals, particularly those from a missionary background.

Professional Refreshment

Sessions ranged from hospital-based medicine to ethics, from family planning to hospital finance, from trauma care to health education, and more besides! Speakers turned up like clockwork, sometimes even from long flights. Many were at the top of their UK careers and spoke with understanding of the work situations of their audience. They taught the best and the most relevant practice for the situations being experienced. To summarise one speaker's ethos: 'True academia is being aware of financial restrictions, personal limitations, and the expectations of those being served, and taking these into account when selecting from various options on how to do something.'

Most participants were working well outside typical 'home' job definitions but found their work professionally satisfying in spite of resource limitations. The lecture format was appreciated because most were starved of information. Interestingly, even those who heard talks on their own subject often found themselves stretched. Lectures were also relevant and informative for those unfamiliar with a particular topic.

Spiritual Refreshment

'I have had enough, Lord,' said Elijah when he fled to Horeb from Jezebel (1 Kings 19:4), and many participants identified with this emotion, related during the communion service. The formal teaching sessions, morning prayers and other times



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of worship, were varied and all equally relevant. Using passages from Job, Habakkuk, 2 Corinthians and Philippians, participants were encouraged to consider world injustice (so evident in the places where many were serving), in the light of the almighty, wise, just and loving God they knew. Through the distress of Elijah to the hope found in Christ, faith was renewed, pain understood and the reality of God's kingdom experienced away from the influences of a cynical, materialistic world.

Some participants felt unable to discuss meaningfully the frustrating issues of unstoppable evil and folly that they had witnessed, with other Christians who had never worked in low-income countries. It was around these themes that the course came into its own. The times of informal fellowship, over meals and between sessions, were as important as the lectures and times of worship in

KEY POINTS

Overseas Update is for all healthcare professionals currently working, or thinking of working, in developing countries. It provides professional education tailored to a low-resource environment and is recognised by UK professional bodies for postgraduate education. Spiritual input gives renewal and direction whilst fellowship with colleagues in similar scenarios is a vital ingredient, all in an ideal setting near London. The next course is 24 June – 5 July 2002; for details contact Joan Arnold in the CMF office on 020 7928 4694.

2002 Course Details

The next course is scheduled from 24 June to 5 July 2002. It is registered with the UKCC for nurses and midwives and with the Royal College of Physicians for Continuing Medical Education on behalf of all the colleges covering hospital medicine. GPs can register their own attendance locally for PGEA.

The following groups would particularly benefit:

1. Those currently working in low-income countries. New ideas are constantly being developed to help isolated workers do their difficult job in imaginative ways. Extra money or technology is not always necessary. This course is almost unique in the world in offering these ideas. Similarly, on a personal level, missionaries who are weary can find the vital spiritual refreshment they need.
2. Those hoping to go to developing countries for the first time. Much can be learnt from the speakers and experienced participants.
3. Those who have worked abroad in the past and returned to a developed country but intend to return overseas, perhaps in retirement. This course can bring people up to date with the status quo on the 21st century missionary field.

During the course there is time to browse over bookstalls provided by TALC (Teaching Aids at Low Cost), CMF and MMA HealthServe, and to look at videos of operative procedures.

Both the beautiful location of Oak Hill College (only 20 minutes walk from the nearest London tube station), and the ideal facilities, make it a perfect venue. Why not come along and experience for yourself this 'refreshment with a difference'?



regard to exchanging ideas and providing support and encouragement. This was probably because, as one retired health professional remarked, participants found themselves amongst others who could truly understand and appreciate where they were coming from, and what they were facing.

Some time was set aside in the programme to hear from colleagues about their work in various parts of the world. These sessions were both terrible and wonderful because of the way in which so often the oppressed are coming to faith in Jesus, and continuing to remain faithful despite extreme circumstances.

Come the end of the course, much had been exchanged in terms of knowledge and experience. Importantly, however, all at some level had found refreshment for their souls, strengthened by the Word and presence of God. This was reiterated through mutual empathy and understanding from fellow colleagues. Such solace was difficult to leave and departing at the end of the eleven days was 'painful', but participants knew they had to return to the 'real world'.

David Clegg is CMF Overseas Support Secretary and General Secretary of MMA HealthServe

Do it anyway

In the evenings we looked at the gifts of the Spirit in Galatians 5. At one the following passage from an unknown source was read and seemed to sum up so much of the motivation to medical mission.

People are unreasonable, illogical and self-centred,

Love them anyway,

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives,

Do good anyway,

If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies,

Succeed anyway,

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow,

Do good anyway,

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable,

Be honest and frank anyway,

The biggest people with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest people with the smallest minds,

Think big anyway,

People favour underdogs but follow only top dogs,

Fight for the underdog anyway,

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight,

Build anyway,

People may need help, but may attack you if you help them,

Help people anyway,

Give the world the best you've got and be undoubtedly misunderstood by most,

Give it anyway,

Christ did it for you.

Source unknown

Why go?

I struggle on in a country bereft of meaningful or conscionable government, where most of the junior staff are on strike and consultants few and far between (the indigenous ones having just 'sort-of' returned to work after a month's strike in my absence), where suture boxes are practically empty, and only two or three antibiotics available (and I realise we are well off compared to other parts of Africa and the world) yet, I have managed to do four times more operating in one week here than five weeks in Yeovil! People ask me if I am thinking of going back to the UK. I retort 'What for?' This is where the Lord called me: should I give up (and get thoroughly bored and frustrated in Somerset) just because of some evil men in power in Harare? No, the Lord will deal with them in his good time, and our task is to carry on and do the work he has set before us. Anything less is to let him down, to walk away from his cross and turn our backs on his suffering, and to his appeal of love.

Michael Cotton