

editorial:

'Health for all by the year 2000'

In September 1978 representatives of 134 nations met under the auspices of WHO and UNICEF at Alma Ata in the south east corner of the then Soviet Union, near the Chinese border, and drafted a document which has become known as the Alma Ata Declaration. Its message was 'Health for all by the year 2000'.

The Soviet Union is no more, and, with the deadline just a couple of months away, no more are the expectations the world will achieve that particular goal. There are brave attempts¹ at a realistic resurrection of this hope for health around the world, and there is some good news among the bad, but as we face 2000 inspired to do better with global healthcare, we need to keep asking the fundamental question: 'What is health?' if we are to succeed.

The World Health Organisation definition is: 'Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, not simply the absence of illness and disease'. While regretting no mention of anything specifically spiritual, Christians would want to support the holistic aspect of that maximalist definition, but must be realistic as well. The definition is impossibly Utopian. We are never going to achieve well-being that complete for one individual on earth, never mind six billion of us.

Ten years ago a group of Christian health professionals and theologians met to consider a more appropriate definition and were attracted to Moltmann's: 'Health . . . is the strength to be human'². It is an empowering definition which avoids any jargon, should engage those of other faiths and ideologies, and leads to the obvious supplementary: 'What do we mean by human?' And now 'the Christian dimensions in healthcare' have their chance, for we can define human-ness (and hence health) in terms of four areas of relationships:

- With God
- With others
- With the environment
- With self

During 2000 *Triple Helix* will be supporting the BMA-inspired 'Millennium Festival of Medicine' which looks back 100 years, to celebrate achievements and to motivate healthcare into the future. *Triple Helix* will look back 2000 years at the achievements of Christians in healthcare as they have followed Jesus Christ, who offers healed relationships with God, with others, with the environment and with ourselves.

Andrew Fergusson

References

1. van Herten L M, van de Water H P A. New global Health for All targets. *British Medical Journal*, 11 September 1999; 319: 700-703
2. Ed. Fergusson A. *Health: the strength to be human*. CMF/IVP, London. 1993

