

Giles Cattermole on encouraging students



SUPPORTING medical students

key points

The first CMF General Secretary, Douglas Johnson, used to say that 'if we look after the students and publications, everything else will look after itself'. His words remain true. The challenge is: are we looking after this generation of students?

Describing present structures and the hope that for each medical school there would be a 'Medical School Team' of local CMF doctors willing to support students, the author makes some specific suggestions.

These are illustrated in the active ministries of three very different Medical School Secretaries.

Medical school is a critical time for students. Many will be away from home for the first time, exposed to new ideas, lifestyles and temptations. Most will make life-changing choices of career; some will make eternal-life-changing decisions of faith. They are ready to learn and discover deeper truths for themselves, and yet often find it difficult to integrate into churches because of their short time periods at university: long holidays when preclinical; placements when clinical.

Christian students will be the next generation of Christian doctors, often with huge influence in their churches and society. Evangelism and discipleship are crucial, and are becoming more difficult in our increasingly hedonistic and materialistic culture that is becoming more overtly hostile to Christianity.

The first CMF General Secretary, Douglas Johnson, is often quoted as saying that 'if we look after the students and publications, everything else will look after itself'.¹ His words are as true now as they were then. The challenge for us as older members of CMF is this: are we looking after this generation of students?

Medical School Secretaries and Teams

At the moment, each medical school has a 'Medical School Secretary' (MSS), a local doctor able to support the local student CMF group. Their roles differ according to their situations (see boxes). Student groups across the UK and Ireland also differ in what they do, often depending on the role of the local Christian Union (CU) on their campus. But wherever they are and whatever they do, it's crucial that we support them, and especially the student reps as they lead their groups. Over the coming years, we hope that for each medical school there'll be a team of local CMF doctors willing to support our students, the 'Medical School Team'.

I took over as the Durham MSS in 2006. I establish regular contacts by email and telephone with the students at all stages in their training. I encourage them to attend our local Teesside CMF meetings where there is opportunity to meet other Christian students and doctors (GPs, consultants).



I also encourage them to attend various CMF events such as the National Student Conference, regional conferences, and others such as *Confident Christianity*. I meet with the local CMF student representatives to pray with them and help them to plan their local CMF/CU meetings within the campus, and also provide them with details of speakers for meetings.

I feel the most important aspect of this role is having a burden for the students; encouraging, mentoring and praying with them so that they will continue to have Jesus in the centre of all they do as they progress through their career.

Vijay Kunadian is a specialist registrar in cardiology who is Medical School Secretary, Durham

No-one should do everything; everyone could do something

CMF members could contribute to student ministry in lots of ways. No individual should have to do everything – in fact, no individual will be gifted to do everything.² Instead, each will be able to contribute something as part of a team. A more senior doctor could speak on behalf of the student group as their patron in the university; some people will be able to offer their homes as a meeting place; some will be able to provide meals; some could co-ordinate the team

As MSS for the Hull end of Hull York Medical School since end 2006, I've been blessed so far in having a well organised and enthusiastic student CMF committee who arrange many of their own meetings. They also organise social events and, combined with the University CU, some evangelistic events. The current cohort of year 3, 4 & 5 students have been great encouragers of their fellow medical students.



My main input has been hosting the monthly 'CMF Open House' meetings which are in fact student meetings with occasional junior or senior doctors, and very occasionally AHPs or nurses. We cook for them (pasta or risotto then ice cream), then there is a talk or interactive discussion on various topics. We have covered self esteem, forgiving fallibility (how to cope when you make a mistake), student electives, being a Christian doctor rather than a doctor who is a Christian, abortion issues/post abortion counselling, and enticers for *Confident Christianity* and *Saline Solution*.

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members and contact lists; some could lead the team as MSS, working closely with the CMF regional secretaries; some could lead Bible studies or speak at CMF meetings; some could give apologetic or evangelistic talks in medical schools; many could meet up with individual students to pray and read the Bible together. All of us could be role models of Christians living and speaking for Jesus as doctors.

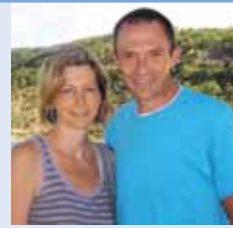
One-to-one

Meeting with a student once a fortnight or so, to study the Bible together and pray, is a huge privilege. Helping someone grow in their walk with Christ helps one's own growth too. This is biblical, pastoral discipleship; investing time building each other up in God's Word, as Paul mentored Timothy. I am enormously grateful for those men who met with me when I was a student – they taught me so much, and encouraged me immensely. The idea of meeting 1-1 can seem daunting because we're not sure how to do it. There are some great resources to help,^{3,4} but at the end of the day, it's simply two Christians reading God's Word and praying together. It's something you learn by doing! It can also seem daunting because we're so busy – but we can probably make room for a coffee or lunch, for half an hour to an hour. It can seem daunting – but the investment is of eternal worth!

Through church, through CMF

Many of our students, and especially leaders, will be disciplined 1-1 in their local churches, but some won't be. We hope therefore that doctors would be active in seeking out medical students in their own churches to disciple and mentor; it's only doctors who'll be able to set that example to medical students of godly living as

It is not good for man to be alone.' God's desire that his people should live in supportive and nurturing relationships, while clearly applying to marriage, also has a much broader application. The intended relationships between Christians, as described in the 'one another' phrases in the New Testament, illustrate this. The rabbinic discipleship model which Jesus adopted and the mentoring relationship between Paul and Timothy are other examples.



A modern medical career makes it all too easy for individual Christian doctors to 'be alone'. Part of my MSS role has been to challenge this 'go it alone Christianity'. Mentoring is a useful term which is used widely in contemporary culture. To me it means walking alongside another person with the intention of sharing the life of Jesus. We have offered mentoring relationships to students involved in CMF leadership, and held a CMF conference on 'Creating a Mentoring Culture'.⁵ Being a mentor to individual students and junior doctors or, with my wife, to two medical students as they approached and began married life, has been a huge privilege.

As Christians, we all have in 'earthen vessels' the amazing treasure of the life of God. Finding ways to share his life with others so they can grow closer to him personally and professionally is an opportunity we all have, and in so doing, we can for a season, be a 'suitable helper' to another Christian medic.

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a doctor. We hope that students would feel able to ask doctors to mentor them – and that if there aren't any doctors in their own churches, that through CMF other Christian doctors would be able to support them.

Final thoughts

By God's grace, I hope we see the growth of local teams of doctors pooling their gifts to serve students. Actually of course, much of what I've said applies to juniors...and even seniors. We could all benefit from being disciplined by a godly, older and wiser Christian! Retired members could disciple seniors, who could disciple juniors...there is a role for all of us. It's likely that older doctors will be more established in and supported by their local churches. So as we begin this work, let's remember Douglas Johnson's wisdom, and start with our students and juniors: they're at a turning point, and they need someone to read them the map.

Please consider how you could play a part. Contact your local MSS (through the CMF website). Ask your pastor for advice about 1-1 discipling (read Sophie de Witt's or Christine Dillon's books). Most of all, pray God will give you opportunities and time, and help you develop your gifts for the service of his people.

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references

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