

do you know what I did last summer?

Clare Bird describes a CMF summer team

This summer saw several teams of UK based doctors and medical students travelling throughout Europe to help local Christian medical groups with medical camps for local students. I joined a GP, two junior doctors and another medical student to travel to one such event in the former Soviet Union.

Christians do not necessarily have the same freedom to meet in this (and other) countries that we enjoy in the UK. Even so, about a dozen students and junior doctors attended the camp - welcomed by many as an opportunity to develop their English. There were case discussions, practical skills tutorials and holistic medicine and ethics sessions, as well as plenty of fun and games. The camp was run by a mixture of local believers, alongside some overseas missionaries working in the area.

After navigating a seemingly complex system in the immigration hall, we were met by our hosts. They treated us to an evening out in the spectacularly developing capital city (there was quite a flurry of building work despite it being



10.30pm on a Sunday!) before making our way towards the coast for the camp. Set in a sandy compound towards the end of a series of dusty, potholed tracks was the site - just a couple of hundred metres from the sea. The compound was perfectly equipped with everything we needed, as well as a volleyball court, table tennis and table football to keep us entertained (and to remind the locals of our lack of sporting prowess!)

The amount of English spoken by the local students varied, so

we were extremely grateful for the help of a fantastic translator (who has also translated for the French ambassador!) A noticeable cultural difference in the students was their willingness to interrupt a seminar when they disagreed. This created great fuel for discussion about the ethics of truth telling, worldview, life beyond death and much, much more! I was stunned by the willingness of students to engage in conversation about spiritual things and their interest in my personal faith. I've spent my student career looking for gospel opportunities with friends and struggling to have much success. In contrast, some of the questions asked at the camp gave me no option but to share my faith!

In the afternoons we embraced the scorching heat playing volleyball, football or baseball before relaxing and cooling off in the sea. There was certainly no lack of competition and our trips to the beach led to more games of volleyball - although surprisingly the Anglophiles performed much better in the water than on land. Perhaps it was down to the comfortable temperatures in contrast to the near-death experiences of the chilling North Sea we Brits are used to!

During the week, I learnt a lot about the practice of medicine locally. The students explained to us that the family is very involved in a patient's care - to the extent that bad news is normally broken to the family first, and then to the patient only at the family's discretion. This immediately rings confidentiality and patient autonomy alarm bells in the Western mind. However, it was a challenge for me to pick apart the cultural differences from the absolute rights and wrongs. There is minimal community care and few family doctors - hence chronic diseases such as asthma and hypertension are largely seen in the acute setting. There was exciting talk about the possibility of a family

practice being set up and also a residency programme for training new doctors.

I feel incredibly privileged to have been part of the camp. I made some good friends with whom I was able to have meaningful conversations about worldviews and the value of life. I saw clearly how medical infrastructure affected clinical practice, and was excited to be involved in discussions with students who hoped to make a real difference in this. I arrived home with more than just a tan and some holiday photos!

I was inspired by the passion of the local Christians and caught the infectious enthusiasm for change in the medical world. Travelling to such a camp was an experience that I would certainly recommend, and is possible even if you can only spare a week next summer. I was well supported financially by local doctors and friends, making the trip an ideal opportunity for a busy student to take some time away, while also serving our brothers and sisters overseas.

Such a camp was only possible due to the hard work and faithfulness of local believers. Please remember them in your

CMF has run summer teams to support growing Christian medical movements for many years now. Most have been in the former Soviet bloc, usually in July or August. Many students have travelled on such teams and been a great blessing to their hosts, as well as growing in their own faith. The nature of these camps means that arrangements are often made quite late in the day ... but if you are interested for next summer please let Giles in the CMF office know, and we'll update you with opportunities as we become aware of them.

prayers, thanking God for them and their willingness to serve. Please also be prayerful for the students who were guests at the camp. Several were interested to know more about Christianity and a few took away books to read. Please pray that they will remain in contact with the hosts and that God will soften hearts to respond to the gospel in the future.

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