



feature

building hope

through education

Barbara Parfitt shares her experiences of setting up a nursing and midwifery college in Bangladesh

The accommodation for the Grameen Caledonian College of Nursing in Dhaka, Bangladesh is simple but from the beginning we were able to invest in computers, textbooks, simulation models and enough space to house the original 40 students. Now numbers have grown to 400 and in September 2017 the foundations for a purpose built college were laid. This college was established using a social business model, relying on generous loans or donations at the start and aims to move towards financial sustainability. The college fulfils one of the developing world's greatest needs: quality nurses and midwives. By providing vital care throughout women's lives, particularly during childbirth, nurses and midwives have a major impact in poor communities.

The college targets young people from disadvantaged communities giving them the opportunity to undertake this international level course taught in English, which is essential if they are to be able to access the necessary resources to learn about and develop evidence-based practice. The college aims not only to prepare international

standard nurses but also to equip them with the skills to become change agents and leaders in their own communities. The majority of students come from families earning less than \$200 per month and without the loans that the college facilitates and the education and training we provide, they have little chance of continuing their education. One of their students, Popi, grew up in a very poor family in the nearby village of Palash. 'Coming here I have a chance to become a proper human being', she says.

I came to Bangladesh from Scotland in 2009 to build a college expressly for daughters of borrowers from the Grameen Bank, which was founded by Nobel Peace Laureate Muhammad Yunus to pioneer the giving of very small (or micro) loans to desperately poor people. In part because of their involvement with the bank, most of Grameen's borrowers send their daughters to school and they value education, many of the young women reaching high standards in their Higher School Examinations. They are excellent students and thrilled at the opportunity for a nursing career.

Since that time the college has grown. I spent

four years establishing the infrastructure and setting in place all the policies and procedures necessary to run an international level nursing college.

In the early days, the college only awarded diplomas, but subsequently permission from Dhaka University means that the college now offers a BSc in Nursing in addition to the Diploma. After four years I retired but the Vice Principal, a Bangladeshi Nurse educator with a great deal of experience who worked with me to establish the college has taken over as Principal and she now has the responsibility for more than 400 students and over 40 members of staff. The college continues to be supported by Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) and Professor Frank Crossan from GCU has worked closely with the Grameen organisation and with the Principal of the college to ensure its success.

The education that the college provides is life changing for the young women and for their communities. Expanding the nurse and midwife program is the most cost-effective approach to solving the growing shortage of



doctors and nurses in developing countries. Millions of people live miles from any clinic or hospital. Nurses and doctors tend to converge on big cities where they can get the best wages. As a result, rural parts of the developing world are bereft of health professionals. Bangladesh, for example, has just one nurse for every 8,000 people and 87% of women in rural areas go through child birth without any skilled birth attendant. Our aim is not only to encourage young nurses to return to their own communities promoting quality care but also to develop future leaders in the profession who will ensure that health policies benefit both the poor and women. Six of the students



and could easily be prevented by clearing the baby's mouth and giving infant-appropriate CPR. Most of these babies don't need anything else to survive, just the quick actions of a well-trained birth attendant.

We've built our nursing school in Bangladesh not just to help the people of that country and give these young women a chance at a better life, but also as a model we hope other organisations will examine and consider spreading around the world. Looking across each graduating class, I see countless youthful faces flushed not just with accomplishment, but eagerness to have an impact. These young women are an untapped resource. Once they get a taste of education, they long for more and they start dreaming of changing the world. We will continue to give them the opportunity to take the giant step from poverty to professional nurses. They will not only repay their college loans, thereby making the program sustainable, they will save countless lives both as nurses and as role models for others. 🌱



from the first and second cohorts have continued their studies in the UK. Two of them are now studying for their Masters' degrees in Scotland and will return to the college as nurse educators and nurse leaders.

Travelling around some of the poorest and more remote areas of the world, I've seen first-hand the tremendous impact well-trained nurse-midwives can have on a community's health. For example, it's estimated that one-third of newborn deaths in such countries are caused by suffocation

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