

John Martin previews the 2018 ICMDA World Congress and offers snapshots of its work and impact



ICMDA LOOKS TO HYDERABAD

key points

- From small beginnings, ten national movements all based in Western Europe, ICMDA has become truly global, comprising over 70 member movements of doctors, dentists and other health professionals.
- The global expansion of ICMDA reflects the story of the expansion of Christianity throughout the world over the last five decades, where the gospel now flows 'from everywhere to everywhere' and its heralds are drawn from all over the world.
- Worshipping with people from nearly 100 different countries is inspiring – a foretaste of heaven.

Hyderabad, India's City of Pearls, will host the 2018 ICMDA World Congress. The chosen theme echoes words from Isaiah's first Servant Song, the role of God's people as 'a light for the Gentiles' partnering in God's work to 'open eyes that are blind.' (Isaiah 42:5-7). For the prophet's original hearers, here was a call to reach out in compassion to the sick and needy. Later, Christians would come to see in it the promise of a coming 'great physician', Jesus – the inspiration and role model for every Christian doctor and health professional. A rapidly changing global scene issues a call for a renewed understanding of Jesus and the mandate to follow in his footsteps.

The first International Christian Medical and Dental Association (ICMDA) World Congress was held in Amsterdam in 1963. The next was in Oxford. Peter Pattison who eventually worked as ICMDA Europe Regional Secretary, tells how Oxford had a life-changing impact on his life and career. 'We were exploring how to respond to a call from God to serve in South Korea. During the conference the chairman of one session remarked that they had a clinical research project in progress in South Korea. The British doctor was leaving and he felt it would be a good post for a Christian doctor. This led to interviews and a departure for

that post a few months later. This became the framework of our work for the next 15 years. It was also a stepping stone to a lifelong involvement with ICMDA and participation in numerous world and regional conferences.'

Since then, a pattern has emerged of four-yearly global Congresses with regional conferences in the years between. Vicky Lavy, who served until recently as CMF Head of International Ministries recalls attending the Durban ICMDA World Congress in 1998. 'It's very possible to feel alone as a Christian doctor, if you are working in a difficult or isolated place. Going to an ICMDA World Congress is an overwhelming antidote to that. When I went to Durban I was working in the small and struggling country of Malawi. I was working with minimal resources in the midst of the AIDS epidemic. The question often on my mind was, "Can a few Christian doctors make a difference?" Standing together with hundreds of brothers and sisters in Durban, I knew the answer: "Yes we can!" We can make a difference because we are not alone. We are part of a worldwide family. Together, we can change the world, one step at a time.' Vicky returned with renewed energy and an enlarged vision. Soon afterwards, the Christian Medical and Dental Fellowship of Malawi was born.

There were ten countries represented at

Amsterdam 1963, all of them from Western Europe. In the 50 plus years since, the ICMDA has broken the wineskins of the West to become a truly global movement. When the Congress returned to the Netherlands in 2014 there were nearly 100 countries represented and bringing together national member movements in 71 countries. World Congresses always have special moments. In Amsterdam doctors from South Korea told the story of the medical missionaries who had given their lives in service to their country as they brought the gospel a hundred years ago. The Christian doctors there were the living legacy of those who had gone before.

Vicky Lavy recalls taking a handful of Malawian students and junior doctors to the World Congress in Taiwan. 'It was mind-blowing for them. Several had never been out of Malawi before and meeting with hundreds of other Christian students was a new and powerful experience that changed the course of their lives. It led to lasting and fruitful relationships amongst Christian students across the Southern Africa region.'

All this parallels the expansion of the Church during these same 50-odd years. It's no longer 'the West to the rest' – the gospel flows 'from everywhere to everywhere'. In the process, the complexion of global Christianity has changed beyond all recognition, not least with the emergence of the Christian global south. As Todd Johnson, one of the editors of the World Christian Encyclopedia is fond of saying, 'The geographic centre of Christianity is located just south of Timbuktu and it moves south every day.'

There was a time when an expatriate doctor headed medical teams. Today he or she will be part of a team of mainly-local well-trained professionals. No longer are mission hospitals the sole context for global Christian medical work. There are a wide variety of openings and Westerners are not alone in relocating to fulfil a missionary calling. There is still a much-needed place for career-long commitments, but also ample openings for people who can give a few months or years, perhaps returning to the same location once or several times.

For Kevin Vaughan, a former ICMDA President who worked internationally as well as in the UK, Rotterdam was 'such a fantastic opportunity to meet Christian medics from all over the world. Worshipping with people from nearly 100 different countries was like a foretaste of heaven.' He adds that it is an enormous privilege to hear leading Christian thinkers, on today's topical healthcare issues.

For CMF CEO Peter Saunders, an ICMDA World Congress uniquely 'opens eyes to world mission and grows leaders'. Ever since 1963, CMF UK health professionals attending a Congress report having their whole outlook and career aspirations changed by the experience.

The wider ICMDA scene

ICMDA's rapid growth inevitably means increased

complexity. For that reason ICMDA divided into twelve regions, each with a regional secretary to keep up the contacts and help with organising conferences. CMF UK is part of the Eurasia region which is led by Rick Paul from The Netherlands. In countries where the number of Christians is small, national fellowships consist of all types of Christian healthcare workers: doctors, dentists, nurses, physiotherapists etc. ICMDA has readily adapted and national groups can join 'if they have doctors and dentists among their members'.

'To reach the East you have to leave the West,' Rick explains. 'There is nothing quite like the World Congress for sharing a vision for the work of ICMDA. But global meetings are costly and obtaining visas can be problematic. So we are also focusing on sub-regional conferences.' An added advantage is that these conferences can be held in a regional language (Spanish, Portuguese, Russian or German). 'More importantly, getting alongside more local people has a greater potential for starting or strengthening national movements, the most important goal for ICMDA', Rick adds.

Emphasis on training

Training for service in resource-poor contexts and for future leaders is an ICMDA priority. Educational work based in CMC Vellore is a beacon of excellence and capacity building for primary care in developing countries. It's a modern example of the historical pattern of the church showing the state a better way. Another example is ICMDA-supported training for health workers for war-torn South Sudan.

The Annual Sydenham Conference, for students from mainly resource-poor countries, is a project organised and run by CMF UK. This is an example where witness among medical students is strengthened. Says one Sydenham alumnus: 'This was a wonderful experience and had a lasting impact on my life. The days were packed with challenging lectures on relevant topics like leadership, ethics and apologetics by a variety of excellent speakers.

'There was also plenty of time to connect with the other participants from all over the world. I gained a fresh passion and vision for my life as a Christian doctor. I recently joined a small leadership team of junior doctors and students that coordinates the Student Ministries of ICMDA in Germany, where I have been able to share some of the things I learned during my time in London,' he said.

In conclusion

So, plan to come to Hyderabad. It may be the start of something wonderful and new for you, something life-changing. If you can't, why not consider contributing generously, so medics from resource-poor countries can benefit from a life-changing event. Who can tell what the impact of your gift might be?

John Martin is CMF Head of Communications.



Conference Dates:

- Students and Graduates
21-23 August 2018
- Pre-Conference
21-23 August 2018
- Main Conference
24-26 August 2018

Theme:

A Covenant to the People,
a Light to the Nation.

Venue:

Leonia Holistic Destination
Bommaraspet, Shameerpet,
Ranga Reddy District,
Hyderabad,
Telangana 500078
India

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