

Ruth Tisdall's elective a nursing role in Israel

In September 2016 I had the opportunity to volunteer for Shevet Achim, a Christian Medical NGO in Israel which brings children from all over the Middle East into Israel to have free heart surgery.

I had been to Israel a few times before but wanted to do something with my nursing to see what it was like to experience something a little closer to real life. Though I am an adult nurse they accepted me with open arms and I was able to visit the children in hospital, monitoring them and providing basic medical care after they were discharged back to the home.

When I found out about Shevet Achim, saw their desire to show love to the children and their

families because of Jesus, I knew I wanted to be a part of it. The application process involved an online form and skype interview. I booked off a week of annual leave and six months later I was boarding the plane to Israel.

A typical day started at 8am with two hours of prayer, bible study and worship. The volunteers were put into teams to make sure everything ran smoothly – from cooking and laundry to visas and medical needs. Free time was on and off throughout the day and everyone came back together in the evening to share a meal. This was a great time of fellowship. We shared 'praise points' from good things that happened during the day, got updates from the hospital team

about how the children were doing and prayed for things coming up, as well as sharing good food.

Initially I wasn't sure exactly what I would be doing because volunteers serve wherever they are needed day to day. I was happy to do anything but did hope I would be able to see a little of the medical care provided in Israel. The Lord was gracious and overall I was able to take the children for their outpatient post op echoes three times over the week and be a house nurse for two of the other days. I would describe the outpatient appointments as organised chaos, but much of the ward care seemed to be similar.

During this particular week, the children I looked after were Iraqi or Kurdish. There was a huge language barrier; however we got by through sign language, simple words and lots of smiling. Some of the volunteers spoke varying levels of Kurdish and Arabic so messages got through.

Israel challenged ideas and opinions that I didn't realise I had about people from this area of the world. I realised that opinions I'd formed from



reading the news were mostly wrong. The biggest lesson was that no matter where someone comes from their basic needs and emotions are the same. These people live through horrors and instability and are incredibly resilient. On the surface they look strong but deep down they want the same as you and I do – to be loved, healthy and safe, and they want this for their families too. The only difference between us is that we were born and live in a different country. The most fulfilling thing is to love and serve others simply because they are loved by Jesus.

I would describe the overall experience as similar to the role of a community nurse in the UK. At the home I was responsible for monitoring the children's wounds for healing and infection, giving them medication, and taking their basic vital signs. As nurses our role is never limited to just medical care and I was also able to help mothers (or the family member that came with them) with the children's general care, feeding and any other needs they had. 🌟

Ruth Tisdall is a staff nurse on a neurosurgical ward