

Consultation on the Future of Healthcare Mission from the UK

Overview

The 'modern' era of medical mission began in the nineteenth century with European and North American missionary doctors and nurses being sent around the world. This work focussed for the next 150 years on mostly hospital based care provided by Western volunteers. While much was achieved in terms of health improvements and the advancement of the gospel, times have changed, the health needs of the world as a whole are more complex and diverse, and the allocation of resources to healthcare (medical) mission are changing around the world, and the stakeholders involved in both health and mission are changing.

Perhaps most significantly, our understanding of mission has changed dramatically since those early missionary pioneers. We are no longer thinking "The West Knows Best and Goes out to the Rest"; rather today we are seeing mission more as "everyone from everywhere to everywhere".

The old wine skins of hospital and expatriate based medical mission are in danger of bursting.

Yet at the same time, Christian organisations provide as much as 40% of all healthcare in some nations, and are at the forefront of community based care in many of the world's poorest nations. So while one model is straining at the seams, there is still much need for and much life in the Christian response to health needs around the world.

What We Aim to Do

In light of these changes, Global Connections want to re-examine why and how we do healthcare as mission.

- What is the theological basis for medical mission?
- What are our aims in doing health work?
- How do missiology, epidemiology and public health strategy intersect and interact with compassionate care?
- And what are the realities that missions face on the ground that are causing many to re-engage with community and primary healthcare as a necessity?

Above all else, we want to learn what God is doing through different churches and mission movements that involves a Christian engagement with health at all levels (not just the work done by health professionals and mission hospitals, but also healing ministries within church planting movements, health education through church volunteers, etc, etc.)

To this end, Global Connections, in association with Christian Medical Fellowship, Community Health Global Network and other key stakeholders, is looking to convene a major consultation in 2010 with different missions, churches, networks of Christian health professionals and other interested parties on the future of health care mission. This is planned to happen in three stages – an initial *Stakeholders' Meeting*, the *Global Connections 2009 Conference*, and a *Consultation Meeting* in 2010.

We will meet initially with invited **stakeholders** (this includes yourself) on **28th April 2009** to

- identify the parameters of the consultation,
- identify other key stakeholders who should be included in the planning process
- identify the key events/mile stones that we want to see happen
- identify the key outcomes we want to achieve through the consultation.

A further opportunity to engage with stakeholders from the UK's mission agencies and other mission movements will be in **November 2009** at the Global Connections conference, where a healthcare mission stream will be part of the wider programme.

Finally we hope to put together a **conference/consultation event in 2010** to draw all the threads together. However, these three milestones are not set in stone, we may wish to use other opportunities and ways of engaging with one another. These are all only suggestions at this stage.

The broad aims of the Consultation Meeting in 2010 will be to find out what new models and innovations are going on, share new ideas between groups that may not yet know of one another, and look at ways of increasing our effectiveness. However, the purpose of the first stakeholder meeting this April is to help us refine and specify these aims.

We would hope to see at least the following outcome from the consultation:

- Greater communication and sharing of ideas and resources between churches and mission groups engaged in healthcare mission
- A greater theological and missiological understanding and explanation of our healthcare work
- A greater understanding of the breadth of health related ministries from mission networks and missionary churches
- A network or networks of health ministries developing to continue the sharing of learning and practice, and facilitating opportunities for strategic cooperation/joint projects and initiatives.

Conclusion

Western agencies and churches do not have the answers, but we do often hold the purse strings and set the agendas. Our aim in bringing this consultation together is not to set an agenda, dictate where funding goes, or set up new structures. Rather we want all the various stakeholders from different parts of the Christian church in the UK to come together in an "oxygenated environment" of mutual learning, encouragement and fellowship so that together we can form a coherent strategy for the revitalisation of health care mission.

Steve Fouch

Chair of Global Connections Healthcare Forum
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