

CMDF Reflection report

By Wong Ching Sze

“May all have abundant life” is why Lamb Hospital was set up for, in the poorest district of Bangladesh, where a small community has formed because of it. It is well known to the locals as “The Hospital that Helps the Poor”. And for years it has been spreading seeds of Christianity to those who has passed by, whether as a patient, a staff or a short-term guest.

A brief introduction of Lamb Hospital would make you amazed of how “abundant” a life they are aiming for. It is a hospital that focus heavily on Obstetrics and Gynecology and Paediatrics, the most vulnerable in the community. For Paediatrics, besides in-patient and out-patient services, a rehabilitation center is set up for children with developmental delay and disabilities. Closely coordinating with Lamb Hospital is a research center that collects data from hospital and the local community for guidance of their own clinical protocols and to make evidence-based medicine feasible. Besides hospital service, Lamb has extensive outreach services with numerous projects in solving health and social problems in the community, such as to facilitate safe delivery, reduce prematurity, empower young girls and advise against child marriage. For education, there is an English medium school as well as a nursing and midwives school to provide high quality professional training. A local church provides chaplaincy services to the wards and all the gardening in the hospital compound is managed by people with handicap.

My stay in Lamb has been inspiring and mind-blowing. Academic-wise, Bangladesh as a developing country has loads of diseases that considered rare in a developed country. I spent most of my time in Pediatrics. Rickets due to malnutrition and congenital hypothyroidism which would be screened and treated at birth in Hong Kong are not uncommonly seen. Cerebral palsy and developmental delay are strikingly common due to lack of antenatal care and unsafe delivery. The chance to be in touch with these patients are precious. I may never have such opportunity in Hong Kong. Besides, with the limited resources they have, I am amazed at how much they can achieve. They do not have incubators to keep baby warm. Therefore, they practice Kangaroo Mother Care, which is basically skin-to-skin contact with babies, to achieve the same purpose cost-effectively. They make spacer out of used saline bottle for asthmatic patients. These low cost management methods work satisfactorily. It leads me to think more deeply about how things work, what is essential to the patients and what is not, what are the local resources that can help achieve the same purpose etc. I believe a more thorough understanding of the management allows doctors to empower patients on their health care needs, especially the poor ones who may not be able to afford expensive fancy equipment. Above all, I highly appreciate their every effort in practicing evidence-based standard medical care. They have protocols and guidelines for doctors and medical assistants, which are frequently updated and strictly followed, so that they do not rely on an individual doctor’s ability but share the best thoughts with the whole team. They objectively measured the outcomes by collecting clinical data, hoping to give the best to their patients, either by “western method” or by “local method” whichever work best in their settings. I did not understand the significance of researches and protocols before but now I do. In Lamb Hospital, these assist their daily clinical decisions and are very practical. Standardization and evidence-based decision are the mentalities from the western countries and they have not compromised what they believe to be a good medical practice in Bangladesh, even if they have limited resources and

have to work against the local culture.

The biggest difficulty I have is the language barrier, which unfortunately is essential if I would like to approach a patient on my own. Often I need to be shadowed by another doctor, who would help me translate and explain the situation. This is less of a problem if I am in Surgery or Obstetrics and Gynecology. Nevertheless, all doctors speak good English and are very welcoming. I feel included in my team and have learnt a lot from them. My mentor, Dr Ruth Lennox, is a Pediatrician from New Zealand and the head of the Department. She is kind, patient and detail-minded. None of them would be annoyed by my questions. And they appreciate my input into their discussions.

But I have received much more than clinical experience. I was invited twice to go to the field into the community. First time was a medical camp that gave antenatal check-up for pregnant women. Second time was a visit to the safe delivery units and to have an understanding of how community projects work. My interest in Public and Community Health has grown rapidly as I see how much more people are benefited under a good health care system than just a good hospital. And sustainability, without any external help from foreigners, can be achieved if the locals are empowered to take their roles in the system.

One of my favorite part of this journey, to my surprise, was my stay in the guesthouse, where short-termers come and go. We share three meals a day over the table, where we have loads of happy memories and impressive conversations. Different people come to Lamb for different purposes and each of them carries different life stories. It has been fun talking about different cultures. It has been inspiring when someone shares his testimony. Most of all, it is beautiful to see all of us has our own roles in building God's Kingdom, no matter what you are. You can be an engineer, a businessman, a financial manager, a social worker. As long as you have the heart, God uses every one of us in wherever our passions and talents lie.

We have arrived Lamb at a nice timing, where we can experience a lot of their cultural activities, like Bangladesh New Year and Easter. If possible, I would like to stay longer until their jackfruits, national fruit of Bangladesh, and mangos ripe. We have little chance to go out of the gate and it would be nice to know more about Bangladesh, especially the real picture of their lives in the poor areas. I would have spent more time in Surgery and Medicine as well, and paid a visit to their research center. Nonetheless, I left Lamb feeling satisfied and blessed. And have seriously consider to go back again.

Lamb is a good place to start if you are interested to have a look in developing countries. It is very safe within the hospital compound even in the dark. With a relatively large community of foreigners, the locals are more used to interacting with foreigners and you yourself can have an easy start in adapting the local culture. Most local doctors are either Muslim or Hindu but they are the moderate ones. With an open mind and a courageous heart, accept their cultures and show respect to their religions, and they would repay your kindness. Most of them do not mind discussing their religions openly and casually. And they are fun people who knows humor very well. I truly miss my time when I was with them and I hope whoever comes after would also enjoy the stay as much as I do.

