

Supporting radiography in developing countries

Rosie Conlon (pictured below), Ultrasound Lecturer, Leeds University/ Project Coordinator (OPT IN) at Leeds Teaching Hospitals Trust, and Andy Creedon, Senior Radiographer, University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust, discuss the benefits of building partnerships with hospitals in developing countries.



Radiography has an essential place in the diagnosis and treatment of disease but many hospitals in the developing world have only the most basic imaging equipment, and staff are often poorly trained in its use or have no training at all (see January 2004 issue of *Synergy – Radiography in Haiti*).

A number of radiographers in the UK are already working hard to change this situation by building partnerships with these hospitals and much support has already been given to those struggling to provide diagnostic imaging services in developing countries.

However, radiographers and patients in developing countries aren't the only ones to benefit from these partnerships. Liam Donaldson, Chief Medical Officer, has commented: "The ultimate beneficiaries from UK professional health workers gaining overseas experience are NHS patients in the UK"

These sentiments are backed up in the toolkit to support good practice in international humanitarian and health work, published by the Department of Health in July 2003.

The Royal College of Nursing also recognises the benefits to professional nursing practice. In its 1996 publication, 'The benefits of overseas experience', it reports that overseas experience can be very valuable for rapid learning to:

- ◆ Prioritise and allocate scarce resources;
- ◆ Develop project management skills and disciplines;
- ◆ Plan, monitor and audit;
- ◆ Conduct health assessment needs for local populations;
- ◆ Manage change;
- ◆ Thinking on your feet and making things happen;
- ◆ Train, teach and develop human resources;
- ◆ Work in multidisciplinary teams and provide leadership;

- ◆ Liaise between sectors and localities;
- ◆ Manage yourself, finances and organisations.

Recognising the value of volunteers working in developing countries

Any individual employed in the NHS today will benefit from further development of these skills, in fact a number of trusts are already recognising the value of supporting volunteers who work overseas. Within the Leeds Teaching Hospitals Trust, this has led to the development of an individual charity, Overseas Partnering and Training Initiative (OPT IN). Projects include the delivery of basic surgical skills courses and A&E department development in Guyana, spinal stabilisation surgery and physiotherapy training at the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed in Bangladesh, training in medical ultrasound in Uganda. This work is supported by the trust which believes that it:

- ◆ Reduces the loss of trained and experienced people, a recruitment and retention bonus;
- ◆ Provides a better return on investment in training;
- ◆ Prevents 'burn out' in mid career;
- ◆ Employees return from career breaks refreshed and with a richer quality of experience.

Formation of a Radiography in Developing Countries Special Interest Group

There are a significant number of radiographers in the UK working to assist their colleagues in developing countries. Currently, many are working in isolation and know little of others working on similar projects. It is therefore difficult for ideas to be shared and lessons learned as nobody wants to reinvent the wheel.

It is proposed that a special interest group should be formed within the SoR, to facilitate the sharing of ideas between UK based radiographers assisting radiography in developing countries. The main aim of the group or network would be to facilitate projects already being undertaken to assist and further develop radiography overseas.

It is also envisaged that new projects may be set up by the group which would involve sending radiographers from the UK to teach abroad, establishing links or partnerships with a small number of healthcare providers overseas.

Previous overseas experience is not a pre-requisite to getting involved, neither is a desire to travel as there is plenty of work to be done here in the UK. In order to make some overseas placements possible, private funding has to be obtained, therefore, administrative assistance is always required.

The plan is for the group to have representatives from within general radiography and specialist areas. Students are also the idea of developing an optional module for third year radiography students to undertake a brief elective overseas has already been suggested.

First meeting of the special interest group

In order to launch and develop the special interest group, a meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 27 April 2004. The meeting will take place at the SoR headquarters in London from 12-4pm.

Presentations will be given by a number of people from within the UK and the NHS who are involved in the development of healthcare provision overseas and there will be an opportunity for discussion on how this work should develop.

If you want to help or are interested in learning more, please register for the meeting by emailing rdcsig@yahoo.co.uk. Even if you can't make it on the day, send a contact email and you will be kept informed of all developments.