



VELLORE NEWSLETTER

FRIENDS OF VELLORE CHRISTIAN MEDICAL COLLEGE & HOSPITAL (QLD)

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(Qld FOV is a branch of the Australian Board of the Vellore Christian Medical College and Hospital)

Dear Friends,

Early in February four of us, Rev John Hooper (the Qld FOV Vice-Chairman), Mr Roy and Mrs Janis Rogers and I, had the privilege of spending about a week at CMC Vellore. We are grateful to Mrs Beulah Premkumar, who looks after volunteers and elective students as well as visitors like us, and to the members of the Public Relations Office for the gracious way they helped us get to see so much of the work of the College and Hospitals and RUHSA and CHAD also.

Continuing support by Friends of Vellore groups outside of India is greatly valued. Many of those we met stressed this. We were told that a beginning has now been made to establish such groups within India also.

Of course it is not possible to see all the work of this great institution in just a week but we are all grateful for what we could experience and for the many people we met.

Kindly note the date of the 2010 Vellore Dinner Saturday 29 May

This popular dinner will again be held in the Emmanuel Uniting Church Hall, 249 South Pine Road, Enoggera.

The speaker will be: Dr Dayalan Devanesen, AM (see p.2)

The planned program includes Indian entertainment and a quality Indian buffet meal. Tickets (adults \$40, concession \$30) are available from Ian Kerr 3372 5970 or Brian Lee 3351 3272. An application form is included in this Newsletter for addresses in or near Brisbane. Do get your ticket early to avoid disappointment.

2010 DINNER SPEAKER – DR DAYALAN DEVANESEN

A CMC Vellore graduate, Dr Devanesen worked in the Northern Territory for 30 years bringing health services to nomadic desert Aboriginal people. He started work there with the Flying Doctor Service, was involved in the struggle for Aboriginal Rights and became the Director for Aboriginal Health. His initiation into the Warlpiri people helped him gain insights into the spiritual and artistic values of Aboriginal art available to few non-Aboriginal people. He was able to adapt their art into health education stories for mainly illiterate folk.

In 1997 he became the first person of Indian origin to be appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (A M) in recognition of his work among Australia's remote and isolated Aboriginal communities.

He is currently the Chairman of the CMC Alumni Association of Australia.

OUT OF THE FIRE – A LIFE OF SERVICE

Speaking at a CMC Staff Training and Development program for secretaries, clerk typists and ward clerks, Dr Prema Dhanraj, Professor and Head of the Plastic Surgery Unit 1 gave an inspirational talk based on her own story, a courageous journey from burns victim to burns specialist. She told of the day her life changed forever when as an 8 year old she was severely burnt. At CMC the doctors struggled to save her life. Her mother's prayer and promise was that if her life was spared she would one day work as a life-saving plastic surgeon in this same hospital.

It was not easy for her mother to keep this promise. For a female child with a disfigured and scarred face, life in India is very hard. And there were 14 sessions of reconstructive surgery before she decided to stop them as she "simply wanted to get on with life". She gained her MBBS degree and in what was described as "a full circle moment" joined the CMC staff when Dr L B M Joseph was Director, the same surgeon who had treated her.

Now a leading plastic surgeon, Dr Prema's numerous accolades and awards testify to her skill. She received much from the staff at CMC and has now given much back – to Vellore, to Ethiopia where she is setting up that country's first burns unit, to numerous other countries and in establishing Agni Raksha (Fire Protection), a foundation and forum for burns victims.

While Dr Prema says she has no regrets at the hand life has dealt her, her life has lessons for all of us to learn.

THE NEW COLLEGE OF NURSING

In 2006 I was shown an empty block of land and the hope was expressed that “some day” this would be the site of the new College of Nursing, a greatly needed development because the existing facilities, built for 200, could not cope with the 600 nurses in training.

In October, 2008, the Dean of Nursing showed me the detailed plans of the proposed new building. The hope then was that something would be on the site before the end of 2009, the centenary of Vellore’s nursing training.

“December 10 and 11, 2009 were two epoch making days in the illustrious history of the College of Nursing.” (a quote from the CMC Newslines 21 Dec).

Alumni from many parts of India and overseas met in the Auditorium on 10th then on 11th took part in the Centenary Walk from the Schell Hospital Campus (where Vellore’s nursing training began in 1909) to the Kagithapatarai Campus, the home of the new Centenary Building. There the Friendship Chapel (funded by two Alumni families) was dedicated to the glory of God.



On 11 December the new Centenary Building, still under construction, was inaugurated by the Tamil Nadu Governor. When complete these buildings will include 17 classrooms, an administrative block, offices, a digital library, conference rooms and the Chapel.



THE PRIVILEGE OF PARTNERSHIP

Rev John Hooper, on his 3rd visit to India shares this with us after seeing CMC Vellore again in February:

My shallow and first memory of this visit can be expressed in one word: “change”. It seemed that every second person had a mobile phone (cell phones, they call them). I was often with a group, medical or Church staff, all of whom excused themselves at regular intervals while they answered these ever- present machines. I felt so old-fashioned – I didn’t have one! I have a vivid memory of rushing down a busy Hospital corridor when I passed a sight I wish I could have photographed – a picture of modern India - a little boy at least 4 years old sitting at the edge of the busy flow of humanity playing with a cell phone, his little thumb stabbing at the key pad with a look of intense concentration on his face. What a shot to miss!



We had the privilege of 15 minutes with Dr Suranjan Bhattacharji, the busy Director, who had some insightful thoughts to share with us. “India’s population increases by 20 million a year. We need to see this, not as a threat, but rather as a gift. We need to see that every child born is a sign that God has not given up on his world.” He said too: “We cannot keep up with the challenge this presents to us. What makes it harder is that the Government has improved education opportunities at Primary and Secondary levels but not at the Tertiary level. Because of this many are going overseas in search of such opportunities.” He referred to a recent newspaper report that in the UK there has been a 40% increase in student visas granted, a gentle reminder to us that Australia isn’t on its own with its influx of Indian students.

I was impressed by the quality of the staff we met, from the top down, from the Director to the youngest staff member serving at the “coal face”. In the Low Cost Effective Care Unit, in the Rural Unit for Health and Social Action (RUHSA) and in Community Health and Development (CHAD) there are people of amazing skill and deep personal devotion facing the incredible

challenges of poverty and need in the Spirit of Christ and of his chosen servant Ida Scudder – “Not to be served but to serve”.

What a privilege we have as Friends of Vellore to work in partnership in support of their work.

FIRST TIME VISITORS TO VELLORE

For first time visitors like Roy and Janis Rogers, CMC Vellore can be rather overwhelming. There is just so much to see, so many people to meet and so many activities and programs to try to understand.

Roy (a Haematology Laboratory Technician) and Janis (Registered Nurse/Midwife) saw, among many other things, something of the main Hospital as well as those that provide hospital services at the village level such as the Low Cost Effective Care Unit and its work with Vellore urban slum dwellers, RUHSA where the work includes a garbage recycling business and the community outreach work of CHAD.

Roy was especially interested in the pathology labs in each of these units which are complemented by the laboratory facilities in the main Hospital.

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR AT CMC VELLORE

A well known Australian broadcaster, Dr Norman Swan, Host of the ABC's Health Report, was one of the speakers at January's 8th Winter Symposium set up by CMC along with the 3rd South Asian Regional Symposium on Evidence Informed Healthcare. The main focus of the Symposium was to discuss ways in which to generate and use reliable and relevant evidence to inform health care in India. Over 50 eminent resource people contributed to the work of the Symposium.

Dr Swan pointed out that for evidence to result in better delivery of healthcare, consumers need to be involved and informed and policy makers should make “the right thing the easiest thing to do”. To this end the media has a crucial role in disseminating evidence. He stressed the power of stories and the use of succinct and memorable “take home messages.”

In a gripping presentation by Dr Binayak Sen, the noted physician and human rights activist, he used examples from national malaria and TB control programs and the Bhopal industrial disaster to show how flawed

evidence and the failure to use good evidence have led to what he called “the genocide of neglect”.

NOTE: While in India, Dr Norman Swan interviewed Dr Anna Tharyan and Dr Prathap Tharyan, Professors of Psychiatry at CMC. This was broadcast on The Health Report on 1 February. You can get it on the ABC website (www.abc.net.au) and go to Radio National then Health Report then Past Programs then Mental Health for “Mental Health Research from Southern India”).

FORMER STAFF MEMBER’S RETURN VISIT TO CMC

In December Monica Hopkins, who was at CMC for many years as an Occupational Therapist, brought visitors from UK to Vellore. These are a just a couple of quotes from her report of this visit:

“The other aspect that impressed me was at the Low Cost Effective Treatment Unit which Sara Bhattacharji runs next to the Eye Hospital. Sushil John took us round the Unit with great enthusiasm and interest. The youngest son of Jacob John, virologist and paediatrician who instigated HIV/AIDS treatment in India years ago, Sushil, once one of the “naughtiest” boys in the Sunday School at St John’s Church, is an example of the best of potential young doctors at CMCH. He told us stories of the thorough way patients were followed up in their homes and with exciting results in their communities. CMCH has sometimes got a bad name for being inaccessible to the local people, and these were examples of this being put right.

“The new multi story private block is providing for increasing numbers of private patients who continue to subsidise those that can’t pay for treatment. At last there is also a scheme to encourage more affluent Indians to contribute to the hospital, particularly through subsidised treatment for poor patients. Hugh Skiel, a CMS mission partner there for the last 5 years, is developing an Indian Friends of Vellore which should have great potential.”

QLD FRIENDS OF VELLORE ANNUAL MEETING

We met again in the historic Raymont Lodge on 8 November. Two engineering students from QUT, Maddie and Naleesha, told of their elective terms in CMC’s Engineering Department. They were challenged to create simple devices using parts and repair and replacement facilities that are available locally. An example was a foetal heart monitor using parts from readily at-hand mobile (cell) phones.

The Treasurer, Richard Caitens, reported that net income for 2008-09 included \$36,224 from donations, \$16,301 from stalls and other sales and \$1400 a Person-to-Person donation. Including two bequests totaling \$70,000, a total of \$130,086 was forwarded to the Australian Vellore Board for transfer to CMC.

The present officers and committee members were re-elected for 2010.

A STORY FROM CMC'S PALLIATIVE CARE UNIT

Mr Gee and his family live in a slum area of Vellore. He and his wife have two sons aged 12 and 10 and a 9 year old daughter.

Mr Gee was the family's sole provider, making his living rolling beedies (the cheap local cigarettes). He started to find it difficult to do his job without getting pain in his chest, he was breathless and extremely fatigued. His family found it difficult at home because of his mood swings. Eventually the pain in his chest and side became severe and he went to CMC Hospital to find out the cause and there he



was found to have advanced cancer that had started in his lungs but had already spread to his brain. He had multiple surgeries and radiation, but needed continued health care and help with his medication.

The Palliative Care Team arranged for him to be admitted to Sneha Deepam, the palliative care centre on the outskirts of Vellore run by Roman Catholic Sisters in conjunction with CMC who use it as a facility for inpatients and for training palliative care personnel.

After years of Mr Gee being the provider for the family, Mrs Gee was in a difficult position, trying to provide food and income for her children and herself. The Palliative Care Team at CMC helped provide the tools and materials needed for her to make a small income. They helped her come up with a plan to work in the mornings making idlis, the small rice cakes commonly eaten for breakfast. She can send the idlis with her children in the mornings to sell to people on the street on their way to school. Mrs Gee is able to visit and stay with her husband most days and to get the support she needs from the staff, as well as the peace of knowing that her husband is well cared for.

THE DR IDA BOOK

There has been another reprint of Dorothy Clarke Wilson's biography of Dr Ida Scudder, the founder of CMC Vellore. Entitled "Dr Ida – Passing on the Torch of Life", it tells an inspiring story of a young woman's dream and her courage, determination and persistence to see it being fulfilled.

Limited numbers of this book are now available here at \$15 (plus \$5 postage) a copy. Enquire from Brian Lee at 3351 3272. This book will be on sale at the Annual Dinner if stocks are still available.

USED STAMPS FOR THE REHABILITATION INSTITUTE

Because four of us were travelling to Vellore and an extra baggage allowance was kindly given by Singapore Airlines, we were able to take 10kg of used stamps (most of these collected by the Sandgate Cubs) for use by patients at the Rehabilitation Institute. On our visit there we were able to see stamps being processed and packaged for sale by the patients. Many thanks to all donors of used stamps.



WEB SITES

www.australianfov.net.au

Vellore and USA sites: www.cmch-vellore.edu & www.vellorecmc.org

STREET STALL NEWS

The Toowong and Tank Street, City, stalls continue to bring in substantial finance to help us support Vellore. Continuing needs include:

- Suitable items for sale
 - Help with transporting the goods
 - Workers at the stall
- regularly or now and again as you are able.

If you, or someone you know, can help in this, kindly contact Mrs Claire Mainstone (3371 1332).

Regards, Brian
(Newsletter Editor).

QLD FRIENDS OF VELLORE OFFICE BEARERS

Chairman: Dr Bella George, 10 Highgrove Ct, The Gap 4061 (ph 3300 3919)
Vice Chairman: Rev John Hooper, 74 Meynell St, Salisbury 4107 (ph 3701 0017)
Hon. Secretary: Mrs Gwenda Spencer, 22 Elgata St, The Gap 4061 (ph 3300 1542)
Hon. Treasurer: Mr Richard Caitens, 107 Northgate Rd, Northgate 4013
(ph 3266 1962)
Stalls Co-ordinator: Mrs Claire Mainstone, 37 Fifth Av, St Lucia, 4067 (ph 3371 1332)
Publicity Officer &
Newsletter Editor: Rev Brian Lee, 19 Glencloy Street, Ferny Grove 4055 (ph 3351 3272)