

My Elective at Kapsowar Hospital: 4th August – 3rd October 2009 – *by Abi Perini*

The quiet concentration of the surgeon and theatre staff bent over a painstaking thoracotomy was suddenly interrupted by shouts of 'C-section coming in! Foetal heart rate down to 20!' Alongside the chest-exposed gunshot victim, we wheeled in a woman in the throes of labour, and began 'scrubbing in' and anaesthetising as fast as our fingers could move. As blade sliced skin, I was directed to be ready to resuscitate the oncoming distressed baby – with the order of 'dry, suction, stimulate!' A few seconds later, my limp assignment was thrust into my arms, and I set to work, silently praying and repeating my instructions as I went. Seconds felt like hours as no response occurred, until ... 'Waaah!' A sudden wail of vitality pierced the suspense hanging in the room. I have never been so relieved to hear a baby cry in my entire life. I was not a neonatologist, or even trained in intensive care; but a medical student, a willing spare-pair-of-hands, who found herself a world away from all that was familiar. My location a rural mission hospital in Kenya's Rift Valley.

As I look back at my experience in Kapsowar, I know that I will always remember it as a very special and blessed time in my life. I went to carry out an eight-week medical elective under the auspices of Africa Inland Mission, but also to 'test the waters' concerning medical mission work. What I experienced surpassed all my hopes and expectations. It was a time of many steep learning curves: medically, socially, spiritually, linguistically, even culinary!

When I arrived at the hospital, the first thing that struck me was how stunningly beautiful the location was: nestled high up in abundant green hills, the ancient vastness of the Rift Valley stretched out beneath us. And the warmth of the people was just as memorable. Early on I learnt the value of relationships in the Kenyan culture, rather than targets or time schedules: I could not go anywhere, even the short walk into the hospital each morning, without greeting several people, shaking their hand and having a mini-conversation, usually in Kiswahili. I experienced how God can impart a real compassion and love for a community. I really bonded with my co-workers, and felt a lasting burden to pray for and serve the patients. On the hospital mission station, my neighbours became cherished friends, and I felt very much 'at home'.

In terms of my medical training, my experiences at Kapsowar have taught me much and increased my confidence. Each morning we began early with a staff prayer meeting, followed by ward rounds. There are two Kenyan junior doctors at the hospital, whom I shadowed for my first month. I was struck by their competence as doctors: always thorough and patient in the face of great busyness – and remarkably skilful with the limited resources available. I was really humbled to meet patients who walk for up to twelve hours across the hills, sometimes overnight and often when in pain or bleeding, to get medical attention. My daily activities were interesting and varied: from suturing the face of a woman injured in a road accident, to watching autopsies of violent crime victims, to donating my own blood to a woman rapidly 'bleeding out' in an emergency situation.

Over my final four weeks I became the apprentice of a visiting American obstetrician / gynaecologist, and learnt how to deliver babies, do c-sections, perform gynae operations and carry out antenatal ultrasounds. Word obviously spread fast that a 'women's' doctor had arrived in

town, as every day new patients presented with all kinds of maternal pathology, rendering our days full and exhausting. As time went on and my knowledge of the inner workings of the hospital and of Kiswahili increased, I found that I was able to be more autonomous and to conduct ward rounds on my own. When I first arrived, I had been wondering how we could go about bringing Christ more overtly into our consultations, as language barriers and time constraints seemed difficult obstacles to overcome. The solution came in offering prayer in the ultrasound room (more private than the crowded wards), and as a routine part of discharging the new mothers back home.

Evenings at Kapsowar were as busy socially as the days were professionally. The hospital has a fairly high turnover of visiting individuals and groups from all over the world, which often made for interesting times of fellowship, usually centred around food. I really enjoyed this aspect of life at Kapsowar: getting to know many fascinating and inspirational missionaries over newly-invented dishes.

The entirety of my trip was characterized by God's goodness and faithfulness; He daily sustained me with His presence, peace, strength and health. In all things I knew Him as my Good Shepherd. I really enjoyed working in a mission hospital environment, and feel newly assured that my life will continue to progress in this direction; that as I 'delight myself in the Lord, He shall give me the desires of my heart' (Psalm 37:4).

In conclusion, it was a real privilege to spend my elective at Kapsowar Hospital, and I am very grateful to MSM for their financial support.