

Training in child health for the developing world

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The age at which individuals born in different societies can be expected to need their coffins is shown in Figure 1. Whereas less than 20% of those born in the 'North' will require their coffins before retirement age, for those born in the villages and shanty towns of the 'South' three-quarters of the coffins will be required before the age of retirement and half of all these coffins will be for children.

The reasons for this appalling mortality and action to overcome it and improve the health of children in the developing world are of full time concern to some of us working in the field of tropical health. For others, such as Professor Wolff, holding important positions in child health in the UK, the care of these children may not be their immediate concern but supporting those who can, has been an important thread in their life's work. Even before taking up the post of Nuffield Professor of Child Health in London University, Professor Wolff was summoned, while still on holiday, for a meeting with representatives of WHO. His initial and continuing support has made it possible for the Institute of Child Health to continue its work for children in less developed countries and for it to become one of the more important centres world wide for tropical child health.

This article describes how the Tropical Child Health Unit of the Institute of Child Health, has, over the last two decades, become one of the premier centres of training in child health for the less developed countries of our world.

Course for Senior Teachers of Child Health

The first initiative was the UNICEF/WHO course for senior teachers of child health from developing countries. This course was run partly in London but also, for a time, in Africa and particularly in the final stages in India. Senior paediatricians from around the world attended this course which lasted ten months, the last three months being spent in travel. Throughout the course an effort was made to persuade paediatricians to design child health services which

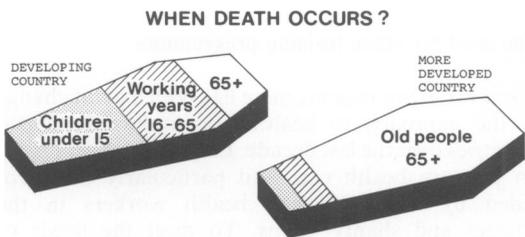


Figure 1 Deaths by age group as percentage of all deaths (Taylor, 1982).

could be effectively organized *within* communities. The course has been well described elsewhere (Ebrahim *et al.*, 1974). A change of policy in the United Nations Organisations in the seventies meant the withdrawal of funds for running such courses outside the developing world.

M.Sc. in Mother and Child Health

With Professor Wolff's guidance and after long discussions, a M.Sc. course in Mother and Child Health in London University based on the Institute of Child Health was initiated in 1978. This course was developed from the experience of running the UNICEF/WHO course described above. After two initial terms of largely academic study and discussion, the fifteen fellows on this course proceed for a month's study in the Newcastle School of Medicine, where they undertake, in pairs, research programmes on features of health in this country or of the functioning of the British National Health Service. Following this the participants return to London and prepare for a period of 8-10 weeks' research overseas in some country, usually other than their own. After this period they return and spend the following two months preparing a detailed dissertation. For many of them this is the first experience of analysing their findings by computer.

The final award of the M.Sc. depends on the presentation of a dissertation on their overseas research studies. Past students from these courses now

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hold a number of senior positions in the universities or health ministries of their countries. We are convinced that the experience of working by themselves and of developing a detailed research project has been of great value to the fellows in the further development of their career. Above all they have frequently developed an enthusiasm and concern for the improvement of children's health in their own country as a matter of national pride. The popularity of this course is suggested by a waiting list of over 100 applicants.

The need for other training programmes

For a variety of reasons there has been a great change in the approach to health care in less developed countries over the last decade. Emphasis is now placed on primary health care and particularly that provided by locally trained health workers in the villages and shanty towns. To meet the needs of visitors to the UK from overseas and those going out as volunteers to work with non-governmental organizations, the Tropical Child Health Unit has developed a variety of short courses on subjects such as oral rehydration, immunization and management.

In nutrition, much of the most effective work is undertaken by nurses and yet up to the present there have been no specific training courses to meet their needs. Over the last two years the Institute of Child Health has offered a six weeks' certificate course in Child Health and Nutrition, which is popular particularly for nurses working in community based health projects.

Community based rehabilitation

An entirely new and important initiative in teaching for the disabled has recently been undertaken by the Institute of Child Health. The World Health Organisation has, over the last few years, laid particular emphasis on the training of community based rehabilitation workers. So far, however, there has been no recognized training for such workers and certainly no appropriate training for the planners and teachers who will initiate such programmes. At the present time those who have had experience in physiotherapy or another of the ancillary professions are undertaking the training of community based rehabilitation. By the very nature of their background, such trainers have difficulty in passing on the mixture of skills a community based rehabilitation worker will require. In particular, the community based rehabilitation worker needs to acquire epidemiological and communication skills as well as a considerable degree of practical ability in order to help the families of those who are disabled, children and adults, as well as the disabled

themselves. For this reason the new training course for teachers and planners of community based rehabilitation currently being developed will have a very practical element.

Teaching Aids at Low Cost

Much emphasis is now placed on the local training of doctors and other health workers in developing countries. Steps are being taken to ensure that this training will spread, in larger countries, into the postgraduate field. Unfortunately there is a severe limitation to training as a result of the lack of teaching materials, especially of books and slides. The organization Teaching Aids at Low Cost (TALC), now an independent charity, was set up some twenty years ago and has become an important teaching activity of the Institute of Child Health. TALC has become the largest supplier of low cost slides for lecturing in developing countries. Currently more than a thousand such lectures, each consisting of 24 slides and a full script, are despatched each month all over the world. This involves the distribution of a third of a million transparencies a year. Material is particularly sought after on subjects such as breast-feeding and diarrhoea management, in which new ideas need to be brought into the teaching curriculum of medical students, nurses and others in the health field.

As its name suggests, care is taken to produce the material at minimum cost and at present prices 24 transparencies can be sent anywhere in the world for less than half the cost of a film of 35 mm colour transparencies. More recently, thanks particularly to support from the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA), TALC has developed a number of low cost books in the field of Primary Health Care. It has been found that by offering a publisher a grant before a book is in print, the unit price of each book can be reduced by five times the fraction of the grant for each book. As a result, TALC now offers around 60 titles, the majority priced at under £3, thus helping to bridge the serious, perhaps even increasing, gap in the supply of medical and health books in third world countries (Figure 2).

Health
workers
need and
love
books



but
hate
today's
prices

Innovations in training

The Tropical Child Health Unit has examined many ways of improving the knowledge of child rearing in the villages of developing countries. One such programme was developed originally to mark the International Year of the Child in 1979. The Institute of Child Health and the Institute of Education, both of London University, jointly devised a programme in which the older children are encouraged to involve themselves with the health and welfare of the smaller children in the family. It is known that in half the families in many countries the younger children are looked after by older siblings for much of the working day. A programme, which came to be known as CHILD-to-child, was developed. Through this programme children of school age are taught and encouraged to concern themselves with the health, welfare and general development of their younger pre-school brothers and sisters and of other young children in their community.

Reference

EBRAHIM, G.J., MORLEY, D., LLOYD, J. & WOLFF, O.H. (1974). UNICEF/WHO Course for Senior Teachers of Child Health: Can a small International Group create change? *British Medical Journal*, **2**, 166.

CHILD-to-child has spread in many countries and perhaps its greatest value is to be found in the way it brings together those working in health and in education in a planned and joint effort to promote the care of younger children in the community.

One of the lasting results of Professor Wolff's twenty years of the Nuffield Chair of Paediatrics and as Dean of the Institute of Child Health, will be the teaching programmes that he has fostered within the Institute. Among these the international programmes developed within the Tropical Child Health Unit are likely to have a long term effect on the life, health and development of perhaps millions of children in the less developed countries of the world.

Booklets and leaflets describing the courses are available on request from the Course Secretary, Tropical Child Health Unit, Institute of Child Health, 30 Guilford Street, London WC1N 1EH.

Information on TALC is available from:
Barbara Harvey, TALC, Box 49, St Albans, Herts., UK.