

Brighton & Sussex Medico-Chirurgical Society

6th Form Essay Prize 2016 – Portia Smith

Trauma Medicine and Landmine Clearance // Dr Ransom, Emergency Physician
(BSUH)

Those attracted to the medical field want to have a tangible, positive impact on others. Before Dr Ransom's talk, I had yet to extrapolate this aspect of the profession to a military setting. Interested in their inherent intensity, I was unaware of how one could be a part of them without condoning 'devastating' warfare, which renders areas grief-stricken and riddled with unexploded ordnances. I would rather work against this. Dr Ransom and the HALO trust do so continually.

The image of children playing with 'toy-like' bomblets and running across minefields had a deep effect, yet it was the following revelation which had the greatest impact on me - we can help. During the Q & A, we found that the members of the trust are just keeping ahead of new mine use. We are on the path to a mine-free world. A world where places such as Yemen are as safe in those regards as Abkhazia, which HALO recently declared clear. Dr Ransom opened my mind to novel applications of medical knowledge, and expanded my idea of what doctors are capable of. A newfound example for me was medical involvement in policy making. For instance, the signing of the 1997 Landmine Ban Treaty by 167 states. Realising my potential global influence as a medical practitioner was empowering to stay the least.

As a prospective medical student, I was influenced by the display of medical qualities emphasised in a bomb-strewn setting. I found that integral aspects of the field are clearly demonstrated in this seemingly alien environment. Such concepts are as relevant to a Brightonian GP practice as an Eritrean warzone. Ransom himself mentioned that the volunteering compliments his NHS work. One idea referenced was the mobilisation of patients/victims to help themselves. This links to a topic heavily focused on at this year's NHS AGM - prevention. The trust sets up education centres, which transform ex-militants into paramedics, and retrains injured members to be of continued use to these areas. The idea of allowing communities a new level of self-care benefits both them and the medical professionals who work with them. There are strong parallels between these courses and First Aid, with the intention of such skills going forth from the hospital setting, and equipping locals to save lives. Either through widening participation in Diabetes clinics, or augmenting the local workforce with trained volunteers, looking beyond people's patient-status can be beneficial.

In many cases, 'victim' and 'volunteer' are near synonymous. Much of the training in these education centres revolves around personal safety, e.g. through securing the scene. These are locals of warzones, and are often unemployed post-war. Talking after the lecture, Dr Ransom explained to me how the paramedic certificate - which they give volunteers after a 2 - 10 day crash course - is designed in part to help them access local medical employment after their area is cleared. Each decision is carefully measured, ultimately bringing about a better result. By observing other

practice, we can be inspired to improve our own work. A buzzword bandied about is 'efficiency'. The importance of this was made clear to me when shown video footage. During a triage simulation, the volunteers made ingenious use of the few resources at their disposal. For instance, lacking the luxury of crowd control services, they devised impromptu roadblocks through the angles at which they parked when arriving at the scene. Against the violent backdrop of such a high casualty rate, the slick teamwork required in any triage is highlighted.

From the lecture title my curiosity was piqued, and Dr Ransom held this with eye-opening accounts of medical situations I was previously unaware of. The inherent similarities in medical practice across borders and between supposedly different situations is a testament to modern medical practitioners and organisations such as the HALO trust. These lectures have expanded my idea of what medicine is and can do, and furthermore what I can do. The ideal of closing the global health gap is one I want to play a part in reaching. The Trust not only removes mines, it becomes an integral part of any community. Through education and support, they aim to help people not just survive but flourish during and after these conflicts. I'm grateful to the trust, and the lecture series as a whole, for opening my eyes to the power and possibilities of a medical career.