

Jesus commissioned the twelve 'to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal' (Luke 9:2). Throughout His ministry, and that of His disciples down through the ages, taking the Gospel of God's Kingdom to the poor has coincided with the ministry of healing the sick. St Luke, who wrote the Gospel that bears his name and the book of Acts, was a physician.

Today, as the poorest nations of Africa and Asia struggle with collapsing health systems, war, debt and epidemics of TB, malaria and AIDS, Christians are still at the forefront of caring for the sick and the poor in the name of Christ.

Many of the early pioneers of the modern missionary movement were also doctors and nurses. Down the years, British health professionals have been major pioneers in medical mission. David Livingstone was one of the most famous, developing the training of African nurses and midwives and starting the process that led to the founding of many mission hospitals on that continent. Others such as Ida Scudder, who founded the Christian Medical College at Vellore in India, have made major contributions to the health of poor nations.

Today, doctors, nurses, midwives, physiotherapists, pharmacists, dentists, hospital administrators and many others are still serving Christ in this way. As they work in conditions that they would not even dream of if they were in the UK, these men and women are in need of our ongoing prayer and support.

They face problems of culture shock – not just in terms of learning new language and customs, but also in a professional and spiritual sense. There is a great gulf between the UK, with its relatively well resourced health services, and those nations where access to even basic healthcare is limited, especially for the poor. Many professionals working in these situations see people in great hardship, often with conditions that could have been cured or controlled had they come for treatment sooner. However, lack of money or easy access means many do not come for help until they are too ill to be cured. Furthermore, treatments and tests readily available in the UK are virtually unknown in some parts of the world, leaving health professionals facing the anguish of watching people suffer and die from conditions that would be treated and often cured here in the West.

In addition to all these problems, many face the threat of physical danger both in or near war zones or areas of inter-ethnic conflict and from the day-to-day violent crime against person and property that is often commonplace in poorer parts of the world. Stories earlier this year about aid workers being killed in Congo highlight the reality of this danger.

Yet at the same time, doorways into many nations otherwise closed to the gospel are opening as governments in Central Asia in particular, and in many other parts of the world, recognise that Christian health professionals have both professional and personal integrity and a commitment to the poor.

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Prayer Points:

1. For those Christians that you may know who are serving Christ using their clinical skills in mission or development organisations:

- For strength to cope with the cultural, spiritual and ethical challenges that they face day by day.
- For safety from physical harm.
- For protection from kidnapping and imprisonment by political factions and governments hostile to the gospel. Stories earlier this year, about aid workers in Congo and Central Asia, highlight the reality of this danger.
- For protection of property and equipment which can be so difficult to replace.
- For wisdom and sensitivity when ministering in a different culture.

2. For those amongst whom they minister:

- That they would see the love of God in those who care for them.
- That many would come to know the Lord through the compassionate witness of Christian health professionals.
- That they would gain a vision of the difference that they too can make in their own environment.

3. For the nations:

- That the West would act with justice and compassion in cancelling debt and by increasing aid to the poorest nations so that their governments can invest in healthcare for their people.
- For the governments of poor nations to be just and avoid corruption, making the needs of their poorest citizens a priority.
- That the new initiatives to fund anti-HIV drugs and other medicines needed in nations too poor to pay for them would result in many lives saved, and much suffering alleviated.
- That in all these situations, Christian witness would be able to continue, and would be increasingly recognised.

