EXPLORING THE PROFESSION: WCMC-Q STUDENTS GAIN AN INSIGHT INTO MEDICAL PRACTICE

COOPERATION with the Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) is set to grow as part of an initiative to allow WCMC-Q students to explore the medical profession. In this way, students will gain a greater insight into the day-to-day practice of medicine.

Through March and April, students observed clinical staff at work in the Emergency Department of the Hamad Hospital, joined ambulance crews on duty, and learned basic life support (BLS) skills from a team of doctors that promotes health awareness among the general public.

Once exams are over in May, students could also join attending physicians in other departments of the Hospital on morning rounds during selected periods of the year, says Director of Student Affairs, Charles Paragg.

The initiative is designed to give students the opportunity to develop links with medical practitioners at an early stage of their studies, something that is not usual in the region. Paragg hopes that, with time, students coming into WCMC-Q will arrange such links on their own.

Working in pairs, students spent a total of nine hours in the Emergency Department over a three-day period in April, following selected patients through the triage and treatment processes.

Mohammed Al-Rayah talks with enthusiasm about his experience. He was impressed that some staff took the time to talk to the students, teach them the terminology and explain procedures.

Continued on Page 2

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

months with several leading US-based journalists and commentators turning the spotlight on the College's educational role.

ABC, CBS and NBC have featured the College in programs on Qatar, and The New York Times foreign affairs columnist Thomas Friedman visited WCMC-Q in October to talk to students for a feature program made for the Discovery Channel.

Meanwhile, articles have appeared in newspapers across the United States, from The New York Times and The Boston Globe to The Los Angeles Times, while Time magazine featured WCMC-Q in an article on Qatar last November.

Since the inaugural ceremony in October 2002, media interest has intensified. Norma Haddad, Director of Public Affairs at WCMC-Q, believes that the increased interest is — unfortunately — partly a spin-off from heightened interest in the Gulf region during a period of international tension.

While agreeing that it presents an opportunity to tell people about the type of education offered by Weill Cornell, she clarifies that the College does not in any way seek publicity as a marketing tool.

Among visitors to WCMC-Q, teams from both ABC News Nightline and NBC visited to interview Dean Alonso and a number of students, while CBS featured the College in its Sixty Minutes, Sunday Morning and Morning Shows during February and March.

The main purpose of the television programs has been to give audiences an overview of Qatar: what its wealth is based on and how the country is changing and modernizing.

Continued on Page 2

INSIDE THIS ISSUE
SEMINAR SERIES:
OF BIRD BRAINS AND DOUGHNUTS

The seminar series, with regular lectures given by local or visiting faculty, is now in full swing at WCMC-Q. This semester has seen a wide variety of topics under consideration, from song repertoires and success in mating in birds, to how the shape of the universe may have anticipated a favorite fast food - the doughnut. Organized by Dr. David Robertshaw, Associate Dean for Pre-medical Education, these fortnightly seminars address a wider audience than a regular lecture course for students.

The purpose is to give faculty members, students and staff an opportunity to consider the broader picture, says Dr. Marco Ameduri, senior lecturer in physics. It is also important "to show how all the sciences are connected together."

Areas covered by visiting experts have included the use of bacteria endemic to Oman in cleaning up oil contamination, by Dr. Heiko Paizelt of Sultan Qaboos University, Oman; the correlation between success in mating, complexity of song and brain development in birds, by Dr. Timothy De Vosd of Cornell University; mammalian chemosensory systems, by Dr. Sarah Newman of Cornell University; and bioethics, by Dr. Pablo Rodriguez from Buenos Aires.

Taking the first of these seminars as an example, Dr. Ameduri comments on its relevance to the WCMC-Q audience: "not only for geographical, industrial and economic reasons, but also because it's addressing our pre-medical students who are well-trained, and have a deep interest, in biology. Here's a person who is using biology and applying it to oil contamination, so this is very appropriate for our audience."

Among WCMC-Q faculty who contributed to the series, Dr. Antonie Blackler gave a seminar on research in the field of human reproduction, Dr. Frank Smith spoke on the use of microwave radiation in chemical analysis and Dr. Thomas Rishel used an article in The New York Times as the starting point for his examination of the shape of the universe.

The seminars introduced students to the cutting-edge, and show that changes in knowledge are happening all the time. "One of the main purposes is to expose the students at an early stage... to real-life research, to seeing scientists at work and presenting their results." In addition, the chance to ask questions and engage in discussion after the lectures is highly beneficial, Dr. Ameduri says.

EXPLORING THE PROFESSION

He comments: "I really enjoyed learning that, it was very interesting."

He was also interested to observe medical staff interacting with patients, and to learn more about the doctor-patient relationship; while some doctors, with a heavy workload, treated patients rapidly, others were "really talking to the patients, and taking their time."

For Heba Al-Missned, the experience of accompanying an all-female ambulance crew during an eight-hour shift was illuminating. She was fascinated to find out how they cope with a work pattern that can mean long shifts overnight, when they also have families; and she was reassured to find that she could react well when faced with potentially difficult situations. Wearing a white coat also gave her the confidence to deal with patients and their families, she says.

Earlier in the semester, all 25 students took part in a BLS and First Aid course presented by a team from the Hamad International Training Center led by Dr. Firas Adel Tawfig Al-Rawi.

The one-day course included lectures, tutorials and demonstrations, and covered emergency management, chest compression exercises, handling of wounds and burns, management of fractures and defibrillation demonstrations.

There were some lighter moments, notably an unperformed demonstration of a Heimlich maneuver on one of the staff by Dr. Munayd Khalid. Students were interested to learn that Dr. Heimlich was a 1943 graduate of Cornell University Medical College. *

There was also wide-ranging discussion of issues that arose during the course, such as the correct procedure for male members of staff when treating women who are covered according to Gulf tradition. It was explained that staff are fully qualified and certified practitioners, and they follow standard procedures for providing assistance; this is accepted as part of their professional duties.

News of further activities at HMC was greeted with enthusiasm by the students: certainly, Mohammed Al-Rayahi looks forward to a time when a formal shadowing system will be in place, and he can learn more about the medical profession.

(*) This was the name of the Medical College for its first 100 years (1868-1968). The name was changed to the Joan and Sanford I. Weill Medical College of Cornell University in April of 1968.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

In this context, Ed Bradley of CBS was able to talk to HH Sheikh Mouza bint Nasser Al-Missned, consort of the Emir and Chairperson of the Qatar Foundation, about her vision for the Education City project, and Julie Chen, also of CBS, spoke to some of WCMC-Q's female students about social change and opportunities for women in Qatar.

The print media have underlined the message of change. Writing in The New York Times last September, Jane Perlez singled out the establishment of WCMC-Q as the most significant example of modernization in the educational field.

A month earlier, in the same newspaper, Michael Holzman praised the initiative as an example of creating goodwill by "public diplomacy", noting that "teaching and medical care are profound acts of public diplomacy that can't be matched by government messages."
TEACHING ASSISTANTS BRING THE "CORNELL FLAVOR" TO DOHA

Now approaching the end of their academic year commitments, the pioneering teaching assistants (TAs) at WCMC-Q have been playing their part in bringing "the Cornell flavor" to the Middle East.

So says TA Justin Matsi, his colleague Debi Mitra adds: "we're taking Cornell ideals and transplanting them here in Doha."

Cornell University graduates Mitra (biology, 2001), Kelly Anna Ryan (biology, 2002) and Matsi (mathematics, 2002) are spending nine months, from August to May, helping to establish the Cornell University teaching assistant scheme in Qatar.

The three came to Doha for a break from school and a taste of work in an international environment.

They note that there are many parallels with the work of a TA in Ithaca. They help with lab sessions, grade students' work, and design problem-based learning sessions.

However, in some respects the 'TA experience' in Doha is very different. Fewer in number, with a less defined hierarchy and a readiness to discuss new approaches, WCMC-Q faculty have involved the teaching assistants in many areas, including planning next year's courses.

"I feel much more involved in the course, what goes on in it, and in the decision-making process than I think any TA would in Ithaca," says Ryan.

Mitra and Ryan are due to enter medical school in the fall, and while in Doha they have set up an MCAT (Medical College Admission Test) review course.

Emphasis is placed on working with students on a one-to-one basis, and providing a high level of support. The TAs are astonished by the ratio of staff to students in Qatar, with ten faculty and three teaching assistants for 25 freshmen. Mitra comments: "everybody knows where everybody is and you are all basically in the same hallway, so everyone looks after each other a lot more."

They find the students in Qatar very similar to those in the United States. The challenges of adjusting to college in Qatar are also familiar, says Ryan: "the students are learning more and more to think on their own, and be independent."

Adjustments also have to be made by the TAs, of course. The trio point out that there is no campus as yet, but the College provides them with high standard housing in an expatriate compound, the use of a car, and support in settling in.

They note that Doha is a sedate town, more geared to families than singles. Unaccompanied males are excluded from the shopping malls at certain times, and single women dressed in normal western style may feel uncomfortable at the open strolls they attract in some parts of town.

A period here might best be seen as a 'quiet interlude' for young people used to college life.

On the other hand, they agree that the atmosphere is friendly. Mitra summarizes: "it's been a great experience. I've learned a lot. You do have to utilize what you're coming to and the type of person you are, because it's a change from college. But people here are very warm, they love to talk about their culture, if you ask questions they are very happy to provide you with information. You have to have a curiosity to come here."

Kelly Ann Ryan guiding Muna Al-Ali in the lab.

STRONG ENCOURAGEMENT FOR WCMC-Q STUDENTS FRESHMEN ARE "DELIGHTFUL" SAYS VISITING EXPERT

Freshmen students at WCMC-Q compare very well with their counterparts at Cornell University in Ithaca, and are clearly capable of taking the academic challenges they are presented with in their stride, said visiting expert Dr. Robert Thorne.

He prefaced his comments about WCMC-Q students with the remark "they're delightful!" Dr. Thorne, who is Professor of Physics at Cornell University, added: "they're very interactive here. The quality of the questions they ask shows that they're really working and understanding things."

Dr. Thorne visited Doha in March to give six lectures as part of the Physics 207 course, and four special lectures. An expert in condensed matter physics, he graduated in electrical engineering from the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg before going on to graduate school at Illinois, where he worked on compound semi-conductors.

An experimental physicist, Dr. Thorne now specializes in two main areas. These are strange electrically conducting materials that display unusual mechanisms for electric charge transport; and determining the three-dimensional structure of proteins by purifying or crystallizing and then analyzing them by X-ray diffraction or atomic force microscopy. The second area, in particular, can make a significant contribution to the development of new treatments for diseases.

He explained that his work may help structural biologists gain a better understanding of how proteins in the body are constructed. It may then lead on to the design of new drugs that bind effectively to the proteins, thereby having the potential for controlling disease mechanisms.

While in Doha, Dr. Thorne was interested to discover more about Qatar. He admired both the "rugged limestone" of the landscape and the brightness of light, and he commented favorably on the quality of town planning. Asked whether he had considered canceling his visit in view of the possibility of war in Iraq, he replied simply: "no, it never occurred to me." Indeed, quite the reverse: he was keen to see somewhere new.
GETTING TO KNOW US:
POTENTIAL APPLICANTS VISIT WCMC-Q TO FIND OUT
MORE ABOUT OUR EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

A steady stream of visitors from local educational institutions this semester has included several groups of young people interested to find out more about what WCMC-Q has to offer, and how the admissions process works.

By the time the semester ends in mid-May, the total number will have reached about 200, says Director of Admissions, Lee Askin.

They include high school pupils from government and private institutions following Qatari or overseas (e.g., British) curricula, and post-high school students who are part of the Qatar Foundation's Academic Bridge Program.

A group of science students from Qatar University is also scheduled to tour the College this semester.

The visits, which last several hours, are designed to give a real sense of what it feels like to be a freshman at this branch of an Ivy League University, says Askin. There is a chance to join WCMC-Q students in a lecture and to observe learning in the laboratory setting.

Faculty go out of their way to make the visitors welcome, says Askin, and there is also an opportunity to meet WCMC-Q students informally to discuss the Cornell experience here in Doha. He adds that the WCMC-Q students have set up a ten-strong group to help make the events a success.

Askin also highlights the need to introduce the visitors to the University's admissions process, and to get across the message that "it's a transparent process, and not as alien as it might have seemed at first."

The aim is to give visitors a new experience: "we want to expose them to something different... so they have some vivid memories."

Meanwhile, when prospective applicants are not coming in to WCMC-Q, Askin is going out to them: in a series of school visits over the past few weeks, he has talked to pupils at a range of schools, including the American School of Doha, Qatari, Jordanian and International Schools. He has also traveled to half a dozen countries in the Middle East region, raising awareness of the College among education officials and students in a total of almost 70 visits.

EVENTS ROUND-UP

BOWLING ALONG

Eighteen students, three faculty and three members of staff teamed up for a 'bowling extravaganza' at Qatar Bowling Center on March 19th. With teams comprising members from each group, a fun and amusing time was had by all, reports Director of Student Affairs Charles Pargag. His summary: it was a "good outlet" for youthful high spirits!

WCMC-Q SETS UP BLOOD DONATION EVENT

Some thirty people took part in a blood donation drive at Education City on April 14th; the brainchild of WCMC-Q student Michelle Al-Khalid, the event was held in the Mobile Blood Donor Unit from the Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) and supervised by Dr Sadiq Ismail, Head of the Blood Donation section at the HMC.

All volunteers were screened and interviewed by HMC staff before being passed fit to make a donation. Dr Ismail explained that international standards required volunteers to be at least 18 years, more than 50 kg in weight and with blood hemoglobin levels of at least 12 for females and 13.5 for males. With a multinational community present in Qatar, careful checks were also made on their length of residence in the country and recent travel record, in order to exclude potential problems from diseases such as malaria.

One unexpected result of the preliminary checks was the finding that some WCMC-Q students - both male and female - did not meet the minimum blood hemoglobin levels, while others were below the weight required. Those interviewed expressed disappointment at the outcome, but added that they intended to adjust their diets and go back to the HMC at a later date to perform this vital public service.

Student Osama Al-Saeed (picture right) said after giving his standard 450cc donation that he was pleased to have had the chance to make a contribution. After observing patients at the Hamad Hospital, he was very conscious of the importance of donating blood to those in need. Osama added that he would be happy to give blood again at a later date.

Riham Daher, who also gave blood, spoke for many when she said that she had been keen to contribute for some time, but had been prevented from taking part in previous blood donation campaigns because she had not reached the minimum age. This was her first chance to take an active part.

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