

G-day fhn supporters

Since my last bulletin we have been very busy with both projects in Ecuador and Ghana. So here is a short summary of how your financial commitment has been assisting us.

I feel a little emotional writing this bulletin, since it is almost 4 years to the day that our first clinic in Ecuador opened its doors to the people of 'El Paramo'. That was the real, 'tangible' start to our projects, and looking at the set-up we have now it makes me feel very proud. 'Ordinary' people in Germany, the USA, the UK, and of course Ghana and Ecuador have achieved so much, simply through hard work and determination, and a belief that working together by pooling skills, knowledge and resources can culminate in such positive results.

Everyone in fhn has worked as a team, and as a volunteer team, even when this has been to the detriment of their everyday lives, to provide the communities in Ecuador and Ghana with health, education, water etc, and a feeling of togetherness and hope.

I am on night duty and prone to rambling anyway.....so on with the facts!!!

Ecuador

The main focus over the last few months has been the increasing ability of the health centre to offer more medical services to the region, and the extension of the health promoter's education, to enable them to take knowledge they learn from their time at the health centre back into the communities.

An experienced laboratory technician has been revolutionising the facilities that we have been providing. Without going too much into medical terminology (or me embarrassing myself at my lack of lab knowledge), many of the prevalent local diseases require complex tests to provide a diagnosis. These involve blood, urine, skin, faeces etc. With the help of this superb German laboratory volunteer, the health centre's diagnostic and consequent treating ability has been revolutionised and drastically improved.

The ongoing training of the health promoters (the local men and woman, trained by fhn in important public health issues) is going from strength to strength. Likewise are the medical brigades. These are co-ordinated 'sejourns' into the jungle, stopping at major villages on the way, in order to provide a variety of services to the most geographically challenging villages. It is like a mule led community health outreach service. This has included: a dentist, a doctor, nurses etc. All aspects of health were addressed and many teeth pulled and many vaccinations given.

With the agreement from the government, we are enjoying the services of a doctor, dentist and nurse, as well as training local people. These roles have included auxillary nurses and a laboratory technician. With the aid of a foreign volunteer doctor, we have managed to provide both 'static' health care in the clinic and 'roving' care on the brigades.

At very very very long last, funds enabled us to get a vehicle for fhn Ecuador. This vehicle serves as both an ambulance and an fhn vehicle. The latter, conveying our staff from Quito to the jungle and helping logistically with any transport of goods, medicines, volunteers etc. This has enabled far more reliable, and economical, (both in time and money) journeys to the project and given the people of El Paramo a definite 'way out' of the jungle in case of emergency. This has replaced the terrible wait for a vehicle to transfer the critically ill.

Womens' groups are going strong in the communities, affording the women not only a voice but some economical independence. Our annual women's day was celebrated eagerly again this year.

The health centre 'queen' pageant was another fiercely fought contest which could have gone either way. Allegations of favouritism by the crowds for the eventual winner were soon silenced by rum and salsa dancing!

Ghana

It has been a very interesting last few months to say the least! We have had several problems that needed a great deal of attention to ensure we did not interrupt the continuity of our service to the communities. The solutions for these needed lots of planning from the UK and Ghana....All excuses for the delay in this bulletin!

Our main problems have been men, and their response to power. The doctor was male, and is obviously an important part of the charity's make-up. He is the senior medical figure in the clinic and also a figure-head in the community.

For well understood reasons and following a pattern laid down by many males in positions of responsibility, they misbehave. Our doc was charging extra money for consultations, prescriptions etc. So he was fired.

That was the start of our problem. We interviewed many would be docs over the next few weeks and all appeared to be of the same stock. Good clinicians but autonomous and unable to work in the structures that we have in place.

In both projects we are committed to employing local people and the training of local people, as i have previously stated. So, we spread our net for doctors a little further afield. With an overwhelming response to a British Medical Journal advert, we were swamped with highly qualified, altruistic docs, leaping at the chance for this opportunity. To work in a well run/fully stocked/full serviced clinic, and provide essential medical treatment to around 7000 people; sounds more rewarding than the NHS work.

The (wonderful) difficulty lay in selecting docs from the many who responded! We now have some excellent GP/tropical medicine docs lined up for the next 18 months and many more in the pipeline.

Essential to bringing in a foreign doctor, is the ability to have a trustworthy 'specialist' who is able to treat the patients who arrive at the clinic. Further to this is the capacity to co-ordinate community health programmes and most importantly to train a newly qualified Ghanaian into being an excellent rural doctor.

I don't mean to labour labour the point, but I think that it is important that you, the supporters of the projects, are aware of the problems that we face, and of our approach to dealing with them. We always bear in mind our goals of community capacization and local training, as opposed to paying our way out of a situation. You will all be aware that is not straight forward running centres in South America and West Africa, and we are learning from experience as we go.

The 'volunteer farm squad' as they are known (basically the health committee and a few others) have finished the planting of 10 hectares of land adjacent to the clinic, that was previously long grass and loved by poisonous snakes. We will see what yield it brings. All the money from the farm is put back into the clinic, to promote its self-sustainability.

From a German proposal, we secured a large solar panel donation, and after many months of budgets and correspondence and hard work from Nick Trueman, we are almost ready to go and give the clinic renewable energy. This is a massive step in our project's development since the resources of the centre can be ameliorated accordingly, now we have power..... and it is not a noisy pollutive generator that eats petrol.

Our volunteer input has become solidified as well since i last wrote. We have had some excellent people in Ghana, in established roles who have really made a difference on the ground and facilitated the improvement in the charity's running. One of the ongoing successes (, are the volunteer physios. We have been sending physios from all over the world who volunteer at our 'sister' hospital in a 'treating' and 'training' capacity. They are especially chosen for their input into post Buruli surgery contractures. This is a condition i have mentioned before that is common in our region, and needs to be surgically excised. Surgery leads to devastating contractures without manipulation and/or physiotherapy. Sally is constantly looking out for volunteer physios, so if you know of anyone who may be interested, please put them in touch.

Our ambulance, which was purchased in 1998 is almost dead.....and thanks to Sir Jeremy Beecham and his trust, we are collecting funds to replace this essential vehicle. Without it, surgical and obstetric emergencies are in serious trouble.

On a general note....

We have almost 60 people committed every month to donations and another 20 or so on annual donations

so..... THANK YOU ALL.....

and an apology for all the hassle I have given everyone to sign up..... after nearly 5 years of doing this we are going really well.....

I would like to say get well James Trezona.....Trez is a very good friend of mine who I think was our first monthly supporter, is an absolute stalwart in fhn's cause and has raised loads of cash for us and bullied his friends to support us. He was in Intensive Care recently and we all wish him well.

Anyone who wants to do an event for us.. you are very welcome!

Lastly, expect a big party when i get home in the summer.....

Regards,

Ed