

Primary Trauma Care Courses In Gaza

Sir Terence English KBE, FRCS^d

For the last 14 years the Primary Trauma Care Foundation, of which I am the Patron, has delivered courses in Primary Trauma Care to over 40 developing countries. Doctors in these countries, both in the cities and in rural areas, have then been better equipped to deal with patients with serious injuries.

The courses, which are systematic and didactic, are of two days duration and are conducted by volunteers. These are followed by a one-day course for instructors, who then assume responsibility for teaching the course to doctors and nurses in their local area. The training manual has now been translated into 14 languages, including Arabic.

In 2008 my friend John Beavis, a consultant orthopaedic surgeon, persuaded me to explore the possibility of taking the Primary Trauma Care course to Gaza. However, it was not until August 2009 that we were able to gain entry to Gaza under the auspices of Medical Aid for Palestinians. We were horrified to see the result of the Israeli invasion of six months previously. Extensive damage had been inflicted on public buildings, schools, hospitals, mosques, private homes and apartments. More than 1400 Gazans had been killed, many of them women and children, and there had been thousands of serious injuries which had swamped the medical facilities.

With willing help from the local office of Medical Aid for Palestinians in Gaza City, John Beavis and I were

able to visit over a dozen hospitals throughout the Strip and in our interviews confirmed that the local doctors would welcome participating in courses such as we described. Medical Aid for Palestinians generously agreed to fund these and so in November 2009 we returned with a team of volunteers from the UK and held the first two courses, followed by an instructors course, at Al Shifa Hospital in Gaza City. There we were provided with good facilities and excellent support from Dr Nasser abu Shabaan and his team. Before our return to the UK Dr Nasser generously agreed to set up and Chair a committee that would be responsible for overseeing the propagation of Primary Trauma Care courses throughout Gaza. Three months later two of our team returned to participate in the first courses run by the locally trained instructors.

Subsequent courses have been a great success and by now many hundreds of doctors and nurses in Gaza have been trained in Primary Trauma Care. During my last visit in November 2010 I was able to observe 5th Year medical students from the Islamic University enjoying the challenge of taking the course at Al Shifa Hospital. All of us associated with this project have come to admire the courage and fortitude with which Gazans have faced the aftermath of the invasion and are dealing with the continuing blockade by Israel. Many good friendships have been made and these in turn have led to other medical projects being started in Gaza which we hope will be of benefit

1 Past President, Royal College of Surgeons of England.