



Faith Integration and Interfaith Collaboration

This issue of the Christian Journal for Global Health features three original articles and a literature review of the influence of Hindu beliefs on how people with disabilities are viewed in India. The spiritual aspects of health care¹ and the effect of religion on public health^{2,3} are receiving more attention in public and academic circles, and health-related strategies are expanding in global mission endeavors.⁴ The opportunities to contribute to this burgeoning area of literature are tremendous.

There is a gap between patients' interest in spiritual care and most professionals' willingness to address the subject. Felisha Younkin and her colleagues evaluated the effectiveness of one day of whole-person Saline Process training for health care students at a Christian university. The focus of the evaluation was mainly on their personal spirituality and on participation in Christian institution activities, reflecting a more evangelical orientation. The pre-assessment reflected a relatively high level of spirituality which did not change, but the training nine months later was associated with a significantly increased degree of participation in Christian or church-based activities or ministries. The authors make some useful observations on how preparation for offering spiritual care may be improved in the future.

Progress in economic development and in access to adequate health care has been uneven in many low- and middle-income countries, and innovative case studies can provide useful information on how to target left-behind communities. Judith Opiyo and Paul Fast describe the implementation of a community-based strategy formerly employed in rural settings, but now in a Nairobi urban slum. The slum is characterized by a very dense but transient population lacking adequate water, sanitation, electricity, police, roads, schools, and hospitals. The Care Group model in this case

was implemented by a small, local, church-based organization which lacked large scale administrative, technical, and financial resources. However, its small size offered flexibility in meeting local challenges and encouraged the development of trust. Assessed indicators revealed significant improvements in maternal-child health in six of the eight indicators over a period of 24 months in a group of 1950 households.

A second case study, undertaken by James Pender and his colleagues, reports how an interfaith coalition between Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims worked together to raise awareness of leprosy in Sri Lanka, a country noted for an increasing prevalence of the disease as well as sectarian conflict. The increased awareness was accompanied by the identification of new cases, but also by significantly more effective contact tracing. Somewhat in contrast, Andrew Wilson has done a systematic literature review of the influence of Hindu beliefs and practices on the approach to people with disabilities. Although there are circumstances where these beliefs can be beneficial, the view of *karma* tends to be a barrier to effective acceptance and support for the disabled.

The journal continues to receive valuable short reports and commentaries on various aspects of Christian faith and service. In a fascinating account, surgeon David Thompson recounts the contrast between an extended period of work in Gabon with a more recent initiative in Egypt. At the new site, he experienced challenges in communication, in competency of his colleagues, in the willingness of patients to trust him, in the acceptance of scientific medical judgment, and in operating room management and safety. Dr. Thompson offers some sage suggestions on how one can work for constructive change in such an environment. Danielle Ellis from Duke Divinity School explicates



how the “Christ humbling” detailed in Philippians chapter two affords a paradigm for all missionary work, consistent with the historical paradigm of the *imitatio Christi* which Professor Grundman has elaborated.⁵ This is particularly relevant to medical missions where consideration for power differentials can be very important. Finally, Lois Armstrong offers a meditation on Habakkuk and an appreciation of God’s providence in coping with injustice and the need for faithfulness and patience.

To round out the issue, Neville Carr reviews *Disability in Mission: The Church’s Hidden Treasure*, coedited by David C Deuel and Nathan G John. The book is a series of case studies supported by a biblical narrative of how disabilities of various types afford opportunities for mission. Dr. Carr notes how these accounts can be moving and inspiring, yet there might be contrary accounts that illustrate failure and disillusionment. The book gives practical suggestions and guidelines for agencies that are biblically, if not strategically, called to include people with disability.

During this year’s Advent season, we share with Zechariah the song of the redeemer of Israel and

all nations, “because he has come to his people and redeemed them . . . to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.” (Luke 1:68 & 79, NIV)

References

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