

Special Study Module on Health and Development

'To consider the health of humanity on a global scale is rarely part of the medical curriculum, yet understanding the health effects of conflict, poverty (gender, socio-cultural issues) and environmental damage, is essential for doctors practising in our shrinking world' (MEDACT 2001)

In 2002, Skillshare International, in collaboration with the University of Leicester Medical School, developed a joint course entitled 'Health and Development Special Study Module' (SSM) whose aim was to develop students' understanding of issues around health and international development.

The module is led by Skillshare International's returned health trainers and senior academics and also involves Skillshare International's development workers and health trainers currently working in Africa and India who support the programme as on-line mentors. Through the opportunities of discussing health care provision with professionals who have international experience, students are exposed to a wider global perspective of health care services, raising awareness of development issues.

In the first year (autumn 2002) 12 students attended the SSM. In the second and third year (autumn 2003 & 2004) 34 students enrolled in the module, some of them from overseas. The SSM evaluations show that students' understanding of development and its implications of health issues in India and Africa has expanded. They have a better understanding of the contribution of NGOs and development workers in developing countries with the lowest level of human development.

Students seem to reflect a better understanding of development. To what extent the students' attitudes towards development issues and health have evolved needs to be explored further. This year, a pilot questionnaire was developed by Dr. Adrian Hastings. It was piloted in this year SSM 2003. The pilot of the attitude questionnaire will continue in the coming years.

"It has challenged me in a number of ways. It has challenged my views on the way the West actually interacts with developing countries – I am more inclined now to believe the West holds developing countries in poverty rather than what I used to believe which was that we are quite sympathetic towards their needs. It also challenged my attitudes towards development work – there are many arguments against development work and through hearing about these I feel I now have a more rounded opinion and feel more able to make a decision about whether I might like to do development work in the future." (2003 student)

Students enjoy and value the contribution from returned development workers and health trainers due to their first hand experience in developing countries. They also value the course learning approaches such as participation, case studies, debating controversial issues and drawing comparisons between developing countries with the UK context on health.

This has been an innovative partnership which has provided Skillshare International with valuable experience and insight into developing more effective modules, building on what has already been achieved to reach a wider target group, developing resources based on work with partner organisations and developing future strategies to mainstream this learning into core curriculum.