

Homeopathy and nursing in Kenya

Nursing Dean of the Faculty of Homeopathy *Patricia Donnachie* describes her recent visit to Kwale, near Mombasa, where a small but determined group of women are training to become homeopathic nurses

I can't ever remember wanting to go to Africa as a child. I do remember talking about the problems in school, especially primary school, but never had the urge to go and see it for myself. That sort of changed around four years ago at the Faculty of Homeopathy's biannual conference, when I listened to a presentation by Cleve McIntosh, a homeopathic doctor. He talked about his satellite clinic just outside the Kruger National Park in South Africa and all the problems his patients had to overcome, just to reach the clinic. I decided that I would like to try and become involved in some way. Like many things, after a while it got put to the back of my mind and every now and then it would pop up, but I did nothing about it.

Sometimes I feel we need a little push to do things we aren't too sure about. My push came when I received an e-mail from Cristal Sumner, the Chief Executive of the Faculty, telling me about a group of 16 students in Kenya who were training to become homeopathic nurses. I was asked to go out and assess the course for accreditation, to be an external examiner for their final exams and attend their graduation. I made contact with Marie Magré, who is the director of the Kwale homeopathic clinic and academy. She knew as a child she would work in Africa and could see how her life would be laid out in front of her. She is the complete opposite of me!

A classically trained non-medical homeopath from Holland, Marie saw where homeopathy could make a difference on a visit to Kenya. She had a vision and decided to turn it into reality. Two years ago she started building her homeopathic academy. She took on 16 girls, or as she calls them, her "sweet 16", who all had to have C grades or higher to qual-

ify for entry. And so the college began.

Shortly before I was due to fly out to Kenya I heard from Marie that following a visit from government education officers, the course they were running needed to be extended from two years to three years, to fall into line with other diploma courses. This would be a challenge for any college but since all 16 girls are sponsored this could have been a major problem, with each sponsor having signed up for two years only. Fortunately most of the sponsors agreed and new ones have been found for the rest of the students, enabling them to continue with their final year of studies. However, graduation arrangements had already begun and the girls' tribes had been informed, with lots of them intending to travel. These girls

would be the first in their tribes to graduate, making this something very special. So, it was decided that the celebrations would go ahead and that a certificate from the academy would be presented. As an external examiner, it made no real difference to me, as the case studies and the oral exams would still be going ahead and so my trip to Kwale was on.

Kwale

On arriving in Kwale village from Mombasa I noticed the majority of homes were small red mud huts with palm leaves as roofs. One of my travelling companions, Julia, told me that the people who were doing well for themselves had corrugated roofs and I could see a few of these. Kwale has a daily market selling



All photos courtesy of Noel Thomas and Patricia Donnachie

Students in the grounds of the homeopathic college in Kwale

mainly fruit and clothes, with some fish and meat. The villagers have to get their water from a well and have no electricity and so at around 7pm at night it becomes extremely dark. As we arrived at the homeopathic clinic and academy I was pleasantly surprised. The buildings are all made from white stone, the roofs are covered with thatch and they have cold running water and electricity. As the week progressed we lost both of these amenities for around three days. Washing in the same water and being unable to contact home wasn't so much fun. It gave me a taste of how things could have been and I was very grateful when the amenities came back on.

More than homeopathy

I sat in on two lectures at the academy to see how they were structured and also to get an idea of how the curriculum was taught. The first was on communicable diseases endemic to Kenya, where the girls were taught about different illnesses, how they affect the body, the treatments available and the information and help that they could give to patients.

The second was on the renal system: the diseases which can occur, what these entail and the homeopathic and conventional medicines that could be used. The

girls are expected to find out as much as they can about the subject to be covered before class and they are also expected to do self learning afterwards. I had to keep on reminding myself that this course has only been going two years. The core of the curriculum has stayed the same, but over time they have introduced new aspects to the course. The girls are able to contact their tutors at all times and Marie, the director, has an open door policy.

At present Marie has a licence which allows her to practice homeopathy and to teach. She has also applied for a licence to train the girls as nurses and homeopaths, and for them to practice at the end of the course. At present they can practice under her licence but their own licences have not yet been granted. As part of their course, the girls have three exams each term, with an end of term exam. For experience, they work in satellite clinics as well as the clinic based in the compound. And this year they will also spend some time working at the local hospital.

The girls are not only getting an education, they are also gaining life skills. For example they have been taught to swim, which is a life saver, as lots of children drown in Kenya – only people with money can afford to learn how to swim. Now

with their knowledge, they are able to teach other people in their villages how to swim and so the learning process begins. They have also learnt to ride bicycles, to drive cars and to make their own clothes. For their graduation they made all their own suits, graduation gowns and caps.

Assessing the students

Myself and Noel Thomas, a fellow Faculty member and retired GP and homeopath, had been asked to be the external examiners for the students' eight case studies and their oral exam. We were kept extremely busy reading all 128 cases, which I must say were very well done. Reading them also gave me a chance to see the differences between our cultures, as well as the many things we have in common. Some of the cases dealt with female circumcision which I found, just by reading the cases, very distressing. Then other subjects like HIV, tuberculosis, as well as all of the things we would expect to see in our own clinics. The students also had a thesis to write, on the subject of homeopathy. They could approach it whichever way they liked. Some looked at its introduction into the communities they lived in and the problems that they would come up against. One girl looked at homeopathy versus witchcraft and the



Teaching in progress; the landscape around Kwale; the graduates together with Marie Magré



strong beliefs of their communities towards the latter and how to offer homeopathy in these kinds of situations.

The case studies were all good and everyone passed. The oral exams went well and again it was interesting to see how strong people are and how they deal with situations very differently to the way European people would. Women in Kenya have, over a long period of time, been treated as second class citizens and men seem to have all the power. This is now beginning to change through education but still, women living in villages have a very difficult time and seem to cope quite remarkably.

The girls all passed their oral exam and showed a very good understanding of anatomy, physiology and homeopathy. I was impressed by their wide knowledge and it was a real pleasure to have been involved in the examination process.

The future

Visiting Kwale was a wonderful experience. This project, as you have read, is very new and still finding its feet. The amazing thing is that the buildings are up, the course is running, the girls have sponsors, but more are always required, and things are looking up. There are 16 more students about to embark on their

second year and the week after I left, 16 first years were due to start. A total of 48 students so far, all working towards becoming homeopathic nurses.

I met the medical officer for Kwale district at the graduation and we spoke about the course and the way forward for homeopathy in Kenya. Very few people know about it in the country. The meeting was very informative and he suggested that as well as the satellite clinics, the students could also work in the local hospitals alongside the doctors, allowing both services to work side by side, which I thought would be an excellent idea. I have been informed recently that this is now going ahead. The medical officer also agreed to help with the licencing problem which meant the girls couldn't call themselves nurses – I'm happy to report this has now been resolved. As the Nursing Dean of the Faculty this is a wonderful thing to see

happening. They have worked very hard, the course meets all the criteria required and they deserve to have the title.

Since returning home I've been told that officials from the ministry of education and health from Nairobi have visited the academy. They were very pleased with the standards and are willing to give their full cooperation in order to have the school registered by the government. The students now need their own licence to practice in Kenya... and so the work continues. It is a daily struggle. I must say that Marie Magré and her team of teachers are up to the challenge. But they need some backing and support from the homeopathic community. I wish them all the best.

If you would like to know more about the project go to www.4kenia.com or contact me patriciadonnachie@blueyonder.co.uk



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The girls in their homemade suits; the college buildings; the computer room and library