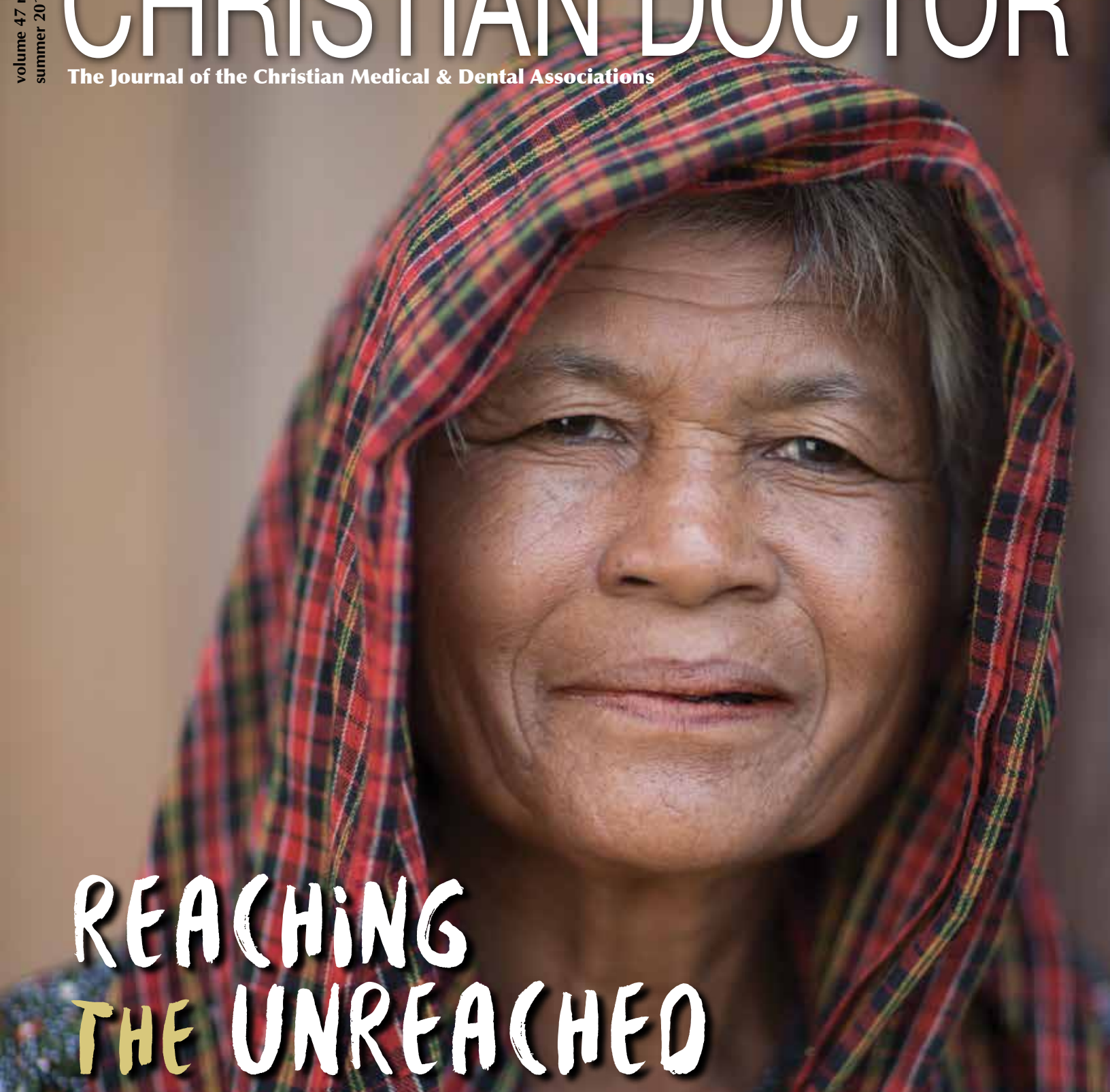


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TODAY'S

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REACHING THE UNREACHED

IN THIS ISSUE



Preparing to serve in cross-cultural ministry



Changing the healthcare of an entire continent



Helping missionaries find spiritual renewal

What a journey! Each one of us was in desperate need of a refreshing break from the daily grind of serving overseas as long-term missionaries. We had flown from our home in Nigeria to Lagos, before catching another flight to Nairobi, Kenya. After leaving the airport, our group of national and missionary doctors and nurses next drove up the mountains to the colonial-era Brackenhurst Conference Center. When we pulled into the long, spiraling driveway leading to the conference center, we knew we were in for a special time. The view was amazing. The sky was a clear deep blue bordered at the horizon by rolling green tea bush farms demarcated by deep brown dirt trails and white stone cottages. Yes, we were exhausted after our travels, but we were also excited to have finally arrived.

Each meal in the enormous cathedral ceilinged dining room was a big homecoming as we greeted and hugged friends we had not seen since the last conference. Their stories were like our own, tales of commitment and sacrifice marked by emotional and physical scars. The plenary sessions each day were resounding choruses of

praise and worship with music from broken and joyful hearts alike, as well as biblical teaching that encouraged, challenged and stirred us. Like the disciples on the mountain with Jesus, we wanted to settle in and stay a while longer, basking in the encouraging fellowship, drinking in the rich teaching and resting in the quiet solitude of this mountain retreat.

For hundreds of long-term missionaries serving in difficult countries across the world, CMDA's annual Continuing Medical and Dental Education (CMDE) Conference is a port in the storm, an oasis in the desert, a light in the darkness. It certainly was for me during my 24-year career as a healthcare missionary in Liberia and Nigeria.

What is the CMDE Conference?

CMDA has a variety of ministries providing resources for students, residents and healthcare professionals in the United States, but one of its most significant activities is running this two-week conference for healthcare



The CMDE Conference: *An Oasis in the Desert*

by William Ardill, MD

missionaries to help them fulfill their continuing education requirements for their U.S. medical licenses. The conference location alternates between Kenya (now Greece) for the African-based missionaries and Thailand for the Asian-based missionaries. Several hundred physicians, dentists, nurses and other healthcare professionals from all over the continent who work in a wide variety of facilities and ministries come together. In fact, it is the world's largest gathering of healthcare professionals serving overseas, and it also includes national physicians.

“It's not easy to describe just how much CMDE has come to mean me as I serve long-term in Asia. The challenges in my assignment are not insignificant—spiritual darkness, poverty, tropical heat, small numbers of like-minded people in country, etc., and plenty of joys and opportunities to grow as well! But knowing every two years we will come together at CMDE to be refreshed academically with state-of-the-art medical education, to have fellowship with a like-minded peer group and to benefit from informal mentoring with those more experienced than myself has enabled me to keep pressing on through the mountains and valleys!”

During the two weeks, more than 180 continuing education credit hours are offered. At their own expense, more than 100 volunteer faculty members travel from North America and Europe to give lectures in their specialties, while other healthcare missionaries present topics related to working in resource poor settings. They also bring updates on the latest research, practices, technologies, treatments and medications in modern Western medicine. At the conferences I attended, I learned about the solar battery-powered hearing aid, how to run a crisis pregnancy ministry, how to make a formaldehyde fridge to sterilize instruments that could not be steam sterilized, the miracle of granulated sugar/honey dressings for healing open wounds and countless other tricks and ideas. The faculty members are amazing encouragers, willing to chat, pray and simply listen to our stories. And what about our areas of service while we're gone? Even more volunteer healthcare professionals travel to our various hospitals and clinics around the world to staff them during our absence.

Perhaps even more important than the continuing education, the CMDE Conference seeks to encourage the attendees spiritually and emotionally. A pastor or well-known

Christian speaker also gives a daily spiritual challenge. I was richly blessed by the profound, biblical teaching of men like John Stott, Alan Farmer, Brennan Manning and Stan Key. There are also opportunities to meet with these servants of God for advice and counseling. Morning prayer groups are times of friendship, bonding and interceding for each other before the throne of God. Plus, children's services and programs are provided, while volunteers also facilitate a separate spouses' program.

For many of us, the most significant benefit of the conference is the networking and encouragement of being with several hundred healthcare professionals in similar circumstances who face incredible hardships and overwhelming medical and spiritual challenges, as well as emotional struggles of loneliness, stress, anxiety and burnout. Some missionaries are new to the mission field while others have spent their careers in cross-cultural ministry. All come for refreshment, renewal and healing. The fellowship with like-minded healthcare missionaries is incredibly encouraging, and we enjoy learning about what God is doing through our colleagues all over the world.

Finding Spiritual Refreshment

I started going to the conference at Brackenhurst in Kenya when I first went to Liberia in 1986 and continued to attend every two years when I was in Africa. I went to each conference facing different challenges. One year I went to Kenya with the fresh emotional and psychological wounds of the Liberian civil war and evacuating from ELWA Hospital. Another year I was recovering from the physical and emotional wounds of being shot during an armed robbery at our compound in Jos, Nigeria. Later in my missionary career, I went to the conference struggling with discouragement and disappointment in my ministry. The conference had a huge





impact on me every time, refreshing me through the amazing music, spiritual messages and encouragement of seeing friends from previous meetings in similar circumstances. Each time I was refreshed and recharged to return to service in the “trenches.”

For one reason or another, my wife Dorothy had never been able to attend the conference during the 24 years we served in Africa. We were determined she would go with me our last year in Nigeria in 2012. We made arrangements for our children and her work so she could join me at the conference. I had great fun introducing Dorothy to my friends from all over the continent with whom I had this wonderful and unusual intermittent relationship.

Dorothy attended the special program for non-medical spouses and enjoyed sharing her experiences living in Africa and being married to a missionary physician. Fellowship with other wives in similar circumstances allowed her to encourage others and be refreshed herself. The weekend in the middle of the conference gave us a fun, refreshing break from the intensity of the demanding meeting schedule to be “tourists.” We went on a walking mini-safari in a Nairobi game park and saw hippos, giraffes, zebras, wildebeests, antelope, duiker deer and monkeys. Dorothy enjoyed shopping at the Masai market in Nairobi and getting a tour of the tea plantation.

Since returning to the U.S., I have had the privilege of returning to the conference as a U.S.-based surgeon to give lectures. Because of the trouble some African physicians had acquiring visas for Kenya, the increasing political instability in many African countries and the desire of some missionary physicians to bring their families, CMDA changed the venue from Kenya to Greece in 2014. This conference had a record breaking number of attendees and was held in a beautiful resort hotel north of Athens.

I will always be grateful to both the CMDE Commission and the many faculty and fellow missionaries who

came alongside me during these retreats, helping hold up my arms, like Aaron and Hur helping Moses, as we served the wounded in the battle for the souls of the lost in Africa.

“We can get CE other ways, but the fellowship is a huge part of it. [This] ministry is really, really important! This conference is different. In the U.S., you can never grasp what you see here—the global effect of God’s kingdom all in one room. Our weekly worship time is five people, and to hear 695 people singing people was so wonderful.”

But I’m only one out of hundreds, even thousands, of missionaries who have been blessed by this conference since 1978. It is of immeasurable value to healthcare missionaries in so many ways—professionally, physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. The CMDE Conference is a far-reaching ministry that has a great impact on reaching the unreached, far beyond what we can even begin to imagine. To get a glimpse of its incredible blessing and how it is making a difference, I encourage you to read the testimonies spread throughout this article from others about how thankful they are for this ministry and how treasured and cherished this conference is to them. And I also encourage you to join us and get involved. For more information, visit www.cmda.org/cmde.

About The Author

WILLIAM ARDILL, MD, was raised in Nigeria by missionary parents. He attended Ursinus College and then George Washington University School of Medicine. He completed a residency in general surgery in 1985 at Baylor University in Dallas, Texas. Following God’s call to serve as a healthcare missionary, in 1986 Bill went to ELWA Hospital in Monrovia, Liberia with SIM. In 1987, Dorothy Hostetter came to serve in the laboratory for the summer. They were married in March 1988 and served together at ELWA until they were evacuated in 1990 because of the country’s civil war. They returned to West Africa in 1992 to Evangel Hospital in Nigeria where they served for 20 years. They have three daughters and a son and live in San Diego, California. Bill is on staff at the Veterans Hospital and Dorothy teaches at a local elementary school.

