137. Nurses Needed in New Nation

In one recent report, the population of South Sudan was quoted at 8.26 million –based, I presume, on the number they counted in the last census. It is highly likely, however, that many people were not counted in the far-flung isolated parts of this new nation and the population is estimated, by some people, to be closer to 11 million. Some statistics can be much more accurately determined. The number of Registered Nurses in South Sudan will be only 158 by the end of this year. Of those, our Catholic Health Training Institute (CHTI) in Wau has so far provided 49 nurses – each of whom has completed three years of full-time residential training, including ‘hands on’ clinical practice. It is a very significant contribution by Solidarity with South Sudan to this new nation.

The number of registered midwives is 79 of whom we have trained 18. We commenced that programme later than the registered nurse training. Registered nurses and midwives are desperately needed in South Sudan. We also offer three years of full-time training for midwives. There are much shorter courses offered by some providers but we have chosen the path of quality care. Many so called ‘health professionals’ in South Sudan have had very little, basic training. At our recent CHTI board, the principal, Sr Dorothy, reported the following concerning the clinical practice of the six women and eighteen men who are about to graduate as registered nurses:

‘This class completed their final study block in June… They are now in the last weeks of their clinical practice focusing on completing hours of practice in needed areas, management and teaching skills and case studies… All of these students assisted in this year’s Fistula Campaign” which was held over a 6 week period in Wau Teaching Hospital. 72 women from the Greater Bahr el Ghazal region and Lakes State underwent operative procedures to correct fistulas they acquired while delivering their babies without correct midwifery and medical care. Some of these women have lived isolated from the mainstream life of their communities for many years. Our students…. assisted in the preparation of these women for surgery, in the operating theatre and in the 24 hour post operative care and education of these women.’

Of the graduating class of seven women and eleven men who are about to graduate as midwives, Sr Dorothy reported:

‘They have completed their individual research projects and are now completing their Continuity of Care study. Here they have been accompanying a woman from her initial antenatal booking visit through pregnancy, labour and delivery and during the postnatal period for both mother and baby. During this time they make at least 3 home visits so as to also know the milieu from which the mother and her family are coming from. Each student has a specific tutor supervising them and their competencies as midwives are assessed during this study.’

It was my privilege to teach the nurse students, who are now graduating, and some of the midwifery students, English and Ethics, for three weeks when they were first enrolled. What is startlingly obvious to me is how much some of them have grown in confidence and poise, in outlook and maturity – the obvious benefit of three years of education and practical experience in a challenging profession. I recall there were 32 in the class I taught and there are 21 of those graduating. Some simply could not cope academically in English. For all of them, English is not their first language. Of course, their knowledge of Arabic is a great help to them in their work in hospitals as many patients are more fluent in Arabic than English. I think that 21 out of 32 is a remarkably high perseverance rate, especially given the long distances some have had to travel and the isolation from their families and home place.

I was only an introductory tutor. The real credit must go to the dedicated doctors, nurse tutors and administration staff who have passed on their professional knowledge and skills. It has not always been easy but all problems have been overcome for the good of the people of South Sudan.

- Br Bill