Global child health after the MDGs: working together to improve lives

On 16th June 2015 the Paediatrics and Child Health Section held their final meeting of the 2014-15 programme. This was one of the highlights of the year for the section as it was a joint meeting with the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) and the Tim David prize was awarded.

Professor Anthony Costello kicked off the day by reviewing the progress made with the millennium developmental goals (MDGs) and looking forward to what might be achieved with the sustainable development goals (SDGs). His insights into the impact of environment changes and global warming gave us all pause for thought and consider our own carbon footprint.

Dr Fred Martineau shared with us the complexities of health systems and the challenges they face. He drew from recent experience with Ebola to demonstrate how lack of resilience within a system can be a contributor to as well as a consequence of ill health.

Dr Marko Kerac discussed what a nutrition revolution from the past 15 years could teach us. The revolution he described was the shift from hospital based to community based malnutrition management. He ended his talk with a call for the audience to get involved as advocates for global child health. This led very well to the next session of the morning on influencing global health.

Dr Andrew Prendergast discussed research in global health and drew on his own experience of conducting a clinical study in Zimbabwe and combining that with a Consultant post in the UK. His own academic journey and tips for pursuing an academic career will, I am sure, have inspired many trainees in the audience.

Mr Peter Nash from the global child health team at the RCPCH described two volunteering schemes that the RCPCH run: Global links and RCPCH/VSO Fellowships. The RCPCH was one of the first Royal Colleges to support doctors wishing to volunteer abroad and they continue to lead the way in this area.

Dr Emily Spry talked about the work that the Welbodi Partnership, a charity for which she volunteered and is now a director, carry out in Sierra Leone. They will have a key role to play in helping to rebuild the healthcare system post Ebola and build upon development work that started prior to the Ebola epidemic.

Dr Cally Tann talked about the challenges we still face in reducing neonatal mortality in low income countries. She reviewed risk factors for poor birth outcomes, most of which are potentially avoidable with appropriate intervention. These risk factors are also pertinent for reducing the risk of neurodisability in those who survive.

Finally Professor Sally Grantham-McGregor shared her experiences of running play based intervention studies in Jamaica and the positive impact that this has been demonstrated to have on neuro-cognitive development and stunted growth. The programme has now been adopted in many low income countries and the imminent launch of a web based programme will ensure that many others have access to the training and resources to develop their own schemes.

The 4 presentations for the Tim David prize were all excellent and in the end the judges could not pick a winner from 2 outstanding presentations. The prize was therefore awarded to both Dr Emma Roche and Dr Polly Kenyon. Professor Tim David himself was on hand to congratulate the winners.

On behalf of the Paediatrics and Child Health section of the RSM I would like to express my sincere thanks to all the speakers for their contributions and to Dr Benita Morrissey, Dr Gareth Lewis and Dr Dan Magnus from the International Child Health Group for helping to organise this day and to Dr Andrew Long, Vice President RCPCH for co-chairing and his continued support of these joint meetings.

Dr Louise Fleming