

MINUTES OF THE GREAT BENTLEY PATIENT PARTICIPATION GROUP MEETING

HELD ON THURSDAY 21 JANUARY 2016

AT 6.30PM IN THE MITCHELL ROOM, GREAT BENTLEY VILLAGE HALL

Chaired by Melvyn Cox

Present: Barry Spake, Communications Officer

Charles Brown, Vice Chair/Treasurer

Judy Ward, Secretary

Dr Freda Bhatti

Sister

Bonnie

Beard,

Practice

Nurse

+ 32 Members

1. Welcome, Introduction

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Dr Bhatti and Sister Bonnie Beard, our speakers on their recent mercy mission to Lesbos.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from Alan and Judy Bishop; Lynda McWilliams; J Fisher; Edna; Annie.

3. Minutes of the last Meeting

No points were raised and approval for the Minutes was given.

4. A talk by Dr Bhatti and Sister Bonnie Beard on their recent Mercy Worldwide Trust mission with Dr Selina Bowry, to Lesbos to give medical assistance to refugees arriving on those shores

Dr Bhatti said that at the beginning of November 2015 she, Bonnie and Dr Bowry had decided to go to Lesbos to care for the refugees. They only had three weeks to sort flights etcetera. In that time they raised £2500 which went direct to the refugees. The medical equipment company "Williams" gave equipment.

Dr Bhatti and Bonnie gave a very emotional account of their mercy mission which included Bonnie's vivid illustrated presentation:

- The team was 3km from the crossing point and the smugglers were bringing in dinghies of around 60 refugees including women and children.
- The dinghies are made to carry 20 people maximum so they were extremely overcrowded and dangerous. The rudders were apparently given to anyone to hold. The refugees were on their own with no navigational system or crew. Engines would break. There are many drownings.
- It is cheaper for the refugees to cross at night than during the day as it is half the price. For a day crossing refugees are charged E2500 per adult and half price for children.
- In one camp where volunteers work from, refugees are transported by bus from the beaches. Between 1 and 5 thousand people a day come in.
 - Refugees are registered to obtain documents to go through Europe. Refugees take a raffle ticket in order to register. No hotelier can take refugees without these documents.
- The transit camp holds refugees between 3-4 hours to 5 days.
- Shelter and medical care is given to refugees in the queues. At night it is extremely cold and there is limited food. Then the refugees are taken on buses to the port to travel to Athens and eventually to Europe.
- The camp is called "Moria" and is on a former military base. It is formed of two sections: a concrete section used by the Syrian refugees, and an olive grove used by other refugees. The campsite is on a hill and is very vulnerable especially at night when it is cold and also in bad weather as there is no protection. Tents are fragile and can be blown away very easily.

The compound used for the Syrians with families accommodates women and children in dormitories. The mattresses are not protected and are often sodden with urine and lice infected. The stench is appalling as are the toilet facilities.

- The available food consists of mouldy naan bread and rice. When the stocks run out people accepted this and walked away.
- The refugees are queuing for everything – for food, to be registered and to join queues for the ferry to Athens.
- The medical centre consists of three tents for men, women and children.
- The interpreters worked tirelessly alongside the medical team. One in particular had been working with the Army and was wanted by the Taliban. He was an interpreter for both the British and US Armies. No assistance is given by the Armies and the interpreters risk their lives for others.
- The treatment given ranged from blisters caused by walking long distances; sprained ankles, coughing, chest infections, high temperatures and sore throats. The refugees are wet and cold.
- Children are severely traumatised showing no emotion, just a frozen stare. One baby arrived with a plaster cast which had to be cut off as the baby's circulation was so poor.
- Pregnant women were given sonic aids so they could hear their baby's heartbeat, especially for those who hadn't heard it before.
- The team shopped at Lidl's in Lesbos for water, clothes, peanuts and fruit. They then had to carry it all up the hill to the camp so they could distribute it to the refugees.
- The team also visited the other side of the island of Lesbos, to Skala via the Oxy camp where they saw capsized boats and refugee divers helping people in the boats. You can only be a refugee once you have "trodden" on the land. It is the same for the divers or they can be accused of trafficking refugees.
- On the boats in bad weather people suffer from hypothermia and sea sickness.
- The beaches are littered with fake lifejackets filled with card and sold for around 25 euros.
- The journey time can be anything from 90 minutes to 6 hours for the crossing; refugees coming from Iraq and Afghanistan too.
- Riot police come into the camps when the tension is increasing. The team knew that they had to leave the camp.

A Question and Answer session followed.

Question: Do any speak English?

Answer: Only a few words. They use signing. Also it depends on the refugees' education. People from Syria and Iraq are more able.

Question: Did people have a plan?

Answer: To run away to be safe. There were some Moroccans there too who wanted work. The majority wanted peace. There are abused women who have been raped and wanted reassurance. When the team returned home they found it very difficult to process. Next time the team will be more aware. On this mercy mission the team had no psychological preparation to cope with the trauma they experienced.

Dr Bhatti and Bonnie thanked everyone for the monetary contributions. They have been completed self funded and the contributions have gone directly to the refugees. Dr Bhatti said for the next trip they desperately need **mag lights, "she wees" and socks.**

Dr Bhatti said that this last weekend she and her son had visited the refugee camps at Dunkirk and Calais and were "petrified". The Dunkirk camp was shocking and ankle deep in mud with no running water and full of disease. The French are stopping people and do not want to expand the camps. All the women and children are in a compound for protection. There are up to 8000 people in the camp. The Lesbos camp was very positive compared to

the Calais camp which is brutalised with so many traumatised. The volunteers are very vulnerable. To be safeguarded and protected the medics register with an NGO (Non Government Organisation) through the Greek authorities, as it is essential to be cautious.

Melvyn thanked Dr Bhatti and Sister Bonnie profusely for giving up their time to come and share their very emotional and moving experiences of their Mercy Mission to Lesbos with Dr Selina Bowry and wished them well for their forthcoming return to Lesbos.

5. **Hollies Surgery News**

Richard Miller was not present tonight but Dr Bhatti reported that all is good and very busy.

Richard Miller has posted the following on the surgery's website:

Dr Bhatti, Sister Beard and Dr Bowry were all humbled by patients' generous donations prior to their visit to the Greek Island of Lesbos at the end of November. The donations made a huge difference to the work they were able to do out there, caring for the refugees. They were able to purchase medicines, warm clothing and food for people in need. Some of this money was also donated to several refugees who gave up their place in the registration queues working tirelessly with them acting as translators. They also were able to buy some ferry tickets for 3 mums travelling with their 9 children who had lost their husbands. They were living in Moria camp as they could not pay to travel anywhere else. The remainder of the money was donated to a couple of charities working over there who they saw were doing extremely good work. All three have asked me to pass on their thanks for all your support.

We can still help by making a donation to Mercy Worldwide Trust using the link below. You can also select the designated fund to help Syrian Refugees:

<http://www.mwtrust.com/donate/>

Since the PPG Meeting, Richard has posted the following regarding Dr Bhatti, Sister Bonnie Beard and other team members' forthcoming second Mercy Mission:

Colchester Refugee Aid

One surgeon, Jo Reed, two GPs, Freda Bhatti and Katy Arulampalam, a practice nurse Bonnie Beard and physiotherapist, Debs Stanton. are going to Lesvos. We hope our breadth of expertise will enable us offer help to many refugees. We are self-funding and not politically motivated.

<https://crowdfunding.justgiving.com/ColchesterRefugeeAid>

They are paying for all the costs of the trip themselves within their annual leave. All the money raised will be spent DIRECTLY on helping the refugees.

6. **AOB**

Melvyn reported that the cost of hiring the room would go up by £1 to £23 per session.

7. **Date and Time of Next Meeting:** Thursday 18 February 2016 at 6:30pm in the Michael Wright Room.

Melvyn thanked everyone for coming to the meeting with special thanks to Dr Bhatti and Bonnie Beard for sharing their experiences.

Judy Ward

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