

## The Battle to Contain the HIV Virus: Vellore at the Point of Attack



*Dr. Jessie Lionel*



*Dr. Anand Zachariah*

The battle against the HIV virus is being pursued in India with grim determination. Working with far fewer resources than their American and European counterparts, CMC and other Indian health institutions are developing their own approaches to prevention and care.

CMC Vellore has a long history of vigorously combating diseases that carry a social stigma. Dr. Paul Brand and his colleagues in the 1940s brought the leprosy patients into the hospital and thus showed society that they were not to be feared and that they responded well to treatments once the disease was understood. In the 1980s, Dr. Jacob John and his colleagues in the Virology Department were among the first Indian physicians to acknowledge that the HIV virus was probably already present in India. Following his hunch, Dr. John was the first researcher to detect seropositivity to HIV in his country. Today, continuing this distinguished tradition, creative and committed members of the medical faculty are organizing programs designed to maximize the effectiveness of HIV/AIDS treatment strategies with available drugs, to combat mother-to-child transmission, and to maintain a safe blood supply.

CMC is strategically well-positioned to play a leading role in the AIDS fight. Through its vast flow of patients from all over the country, it is able to monitor the spread of the virus through testing thousands of people each week, which includes anyone needing surgery, or donating blood, or those requesting voluntary testing.

HIV positive patients at Vellore are provided with all the appropriate treatments that are affordable. While the full retroviral treatment used in the USA and Europe is too expensive for almost everyone in India, there are other less costly strategies to maximize survival time and quality of life. CMC Vellore does not isolate HIV patients or refer them to specialty hospitals. This is a key policy that counteracts the social inclination to stigmatize them.

Dr. G. Sridharan and his colleagues in the virology department work overtime with HIV+ patients, monitoring viral loads, detecting secondary infections and recommending treatments.

Dr. Jessie Lionel and her colleagues in Obstetrics and Gynecology have a

special program dealing with HIV+ women who are pregnant. With the assistance of the Fogarty Fund, they use drugs that greatly reduce the chance of transmitting the virus to the newborn child. Dr. Vasani Philip Verghese, in pediatrics, is committed to tending to children with HIV.

A recent ASHA grant has focused on developing a mobile outreach dimension to CMC's blood bank. Those in charge are hoping CMC can become a regional supplier of blood, thereby minimizing the chances of spreading HIV through the blood supply in the Vellore area.

CMC also is strategically positioned to strengthen anti-AIDS work across the entire country through the network of mission hospitals that look to CMC for leadership.

Dr. Anand Zachariah of the General Medicine department has created a one-year training course for physicians to equip them with the best possible information about prevention and treatment strategies. Training 25 doctors a year, Dr. Zachariah aims to have a center of AIDS treatment expertise in every district in India. (A district is roughly equivalent to a county.)

Even in the low-cost environment of India, AIDS prevention and treatment is expensive. Financial support is sought for the following specific purposes:

- Special tests to monitor the progress of the disease in infected individuals, allowing for the best possible treatment to be applied. (Virology Department)
- Caesarian deliveries, nutrition supplements, and social work for HIV+ pregnant women. (Obstetrics and Gynecology Department)
- Out-of-pocket expenses for research and development projects by doctors in Dr. Zachariah's training program. (These projects often significantly improve treatment strategies in the mission hospitals.)
- Better pain drugs for terminal AIDS patients who are in hospice care.

## Letter from the President

**Dear Friends,**

During my recent visit to Vellore, I attended an early morning worship service at the College Chapel on January 26, which is Republic Day in India. This is a holiday observed throughout the country with solemn and dignified ceremonies.



A sand painting map of India with each state in a different color was laid out on the chapel floor. It was surrounded with candles, creating a serene patriotic and spiritual moment.

Dr. J.P. Muliylil, principal of the medical college and preacher for the day, spoke of the great pride he felt toward his country and his institution. He described how CMC brings glory to God's name and to the nation of India. He used as an example the magnificent scientific and humanitarian achievements of Dr. Mammen Chandy, hematologist. Dr. Muliylil said that during a recent presentation by Dr. Chandy, his hair stood on end because of the sheer brilliance of the insights.

People often ask Dr. Muliylil how CMC is able to keep faculty members who have become world-class authorities in their field. He is proud of the tradition of faith-based commitment that makes CMC the institution of choice for so many excellent professionals. He is proud that 40% of CMC revenue is used to subsidize education for students or treatment for the poor.

Dr. Muliylil concluded by reminding everyone that Republic Day was a remembrance of the founding of a nation on a shared dream of a just and equitable society. We must continue to share that vision and make CMC a place that is viewed with respect and pride by the thousands of Indian citizens who pass through its gates daily.

**Sincerely,**  
**Lou Knowles**

## CONGRATULATIONS DR. ANNA GUPTA

Dr. Gupta was given the prestigious Clark Award by the University of Windsor, which recognizes outstanding personal service and significant commitments in time, energy and expertise by serving on boards, committees and campaigns.

Dr. Gupta is a graduate, the first Indian staff member and former Dean of the College of Nursing, Vellore CMC.

In 1968, she joined the faculty of the Univ. of Windsor to help start a new integrated professional undergraduate degree program. She became director of the school in 1970.

Dr. Gupta served as Corporate member of the Vellore Board USA for many years and from 1991-1997 was a Director. A strong supporter of CMC, serving on several board committees, Dr. Gupta has graciously agreed to be honorary co-chair of the Board's upcoming drive to raise funds for the new College of Nursing campus.



*Board travel group witnessed a temple elephant procession in Kochin.*

## Board Trip to Vellore — Interesting & Entertaining

From tigers to tea, from cardamom to classic Kerala dance-drama, the 2004 Vellore Board visit to India was a smash hit. The twelve travelers, mostly from San Antonio, Texas spent two weeks absorbing the exotic sites, smells, and flavors of southern India.

The high point of the expedition came during three days in Vellore. The outpouring of hospitality from faculty and staff was overwhelming. The readiness of everyone at the college and hospital to take time from their busy schedules to share their knowledge made the stay a deeply enriching experience. The American guests toured the high-tech labs of the hospital, and the community outreach programs of the Community Health Department, RUHSA, CONCH and Low Cost Effective Care. Several senior faculty members spent a pleasant but intense evening over dinner with the group at the Big Bungalow, discussing CMC's work in detail. Dr. George Chandy Director of CMC, met with the group, explaining the present situation and the challenges faced by CMC.

Credit for this great success goes to Vick and Dorothy Williams of San Antonio, who single-handedly conceived of the trip, recruited participants and acted as leaders while in India. The Board hopes to organize at least one tour each year. Please let us know of your interest in being a part of a future delegation.

## Student Computer Labs Functioning



*Medical students working on computers in the new lab.*

A recent American Schools and Hospitals Abroad (ASHA) grant for \$310,000 equipped the computer labs for students and provided capability to computerize library services. Medical College and College of Nursing students no longer have to cadge time on their professor's computer or make the trip to the Internet Caf.

The latest in audio-visual equipment for use in small group educational settings is also in place, as is an oral camera for dental surgery.

By the end of this grant in December, a video monitor and processor for the Clinical Gastroenterology Department will also be installed. As a premier medical and educational institution with an international reputation for excellence, CMC partners with ASHA to showcase educational and medical technologies and practices that improve the quality of education and contribute to improved health care.



*Rehab Gathering: For more information and pictures about both events, visit our web site: [www.vellorecmc.org](http://www.vellorecmc.org)*

## Celebrations at LCEC and Rehab Institute

January saw two joyous celebrations back-to-back. With the attendance of CMC Council members who were in town for the winter meeting, the Low Cost Effective Care Unit (LCEC) dedicated its new building on January 23. Made possible by a gift from Dr. Robert Fish of Connecticut, the new structure provides expanded and improved ward space, delivery rooms and other useful features.

The next day, the staff and patients of the Rehabilitation Institute turned the sod for a major expansion, including the Paul and Margaret Brand Floor. The new space and amenities will help greatly in addressing the needs of head injury patients. Dr. Suranjan Bhattacharji, head of the Institute, thanks contributors from the U.K. and the U.S., including a group of U.S. plastic surgeons who were organized by Dr. Peter Randall.

## Artificial Motorized Hand Project

An important activity of the Bioengineering Department is the development of affordable, high-quality health care technology. Engineers working at CMC have developed an artificial motorized hand, low-cost stimulators, and computer-based experiments in physiology.

The motorized prosthetic hand was initially designed at the India Institute of Technology (IIT)-Bombay and was subjected to two years of clinical trials in Vellore's Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation department.

The prototype hands, fabricated at WORTH Trust, Katpadi in 2001, were improved at CMC following feedback from the eight patients. Cost of the hand is about Rs. 5,000 (\$111). An additional 25 amputees have been fitted with the artificial hands and rehabilitation centers in the country have been invited to participate in a broad based evaluation. A



*Technician working on the artificial hand.*

more advanced hand design providing additional flexibility, will cost Rs. 10,000 (\$223). The development of this artificial hand was made possible by close interaction of staff from Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Prosthetics and PMR departments. Collaboration among IIT (Bombay) and WORTH Trust and CMC will enable continued development, design improvement and low retail prices.

A key figure in this development is Dr. Suresh Devasahayam who trained and taught at IIT-Bombay and is now in residence at Vellore. Along with Dr. Suranjan Bhattacharji, Professor and Head of PMR, Dr. Devasahayam led a hardworking team to bring this project to fruition.

## New Slate of Officers Elected



*Edwina Scudder Youth,  
Chair of the Board*

At the September 20, 2003 Board Meeting, Dr. Alex Kuruvilla, Nominating Committee Chair, presented the committee's nominations for Board Officers. Elected were:

Mrs. Edwina Scudder Youth - Chair of the Board  
Dr. Alexander Kuruvilla - Secretary of the Board  
Dr. Patricia Gass - Member-at-large

Mrs. Youth appointed Rev. William Sadler, Chair of the Personnel Committee and reappointed three committee chairs: Mr. George Varughese, Finance, Mrs. Dorothy Williams, Promotion & Development, and Dr. Rachel Zachariah, Ida Scudder Program.

## Vellore Speaks Through You

When Ida S. Scudder toured the U.S., she campaigned to draw people to Vellore's mission. Her personal connections were vital to patients, students and the growth of the institution, often transforming those she contacted. Today, personal connections are also important.

Board office staff can pull together a package to help you introduce CMC to your friends, your worshiping community, your civic club, or your social group. Customized packets can include a CD ROM slide show presentation, with sound, printed materials, photographs, videos, or books.

In Ohio, a nurse who met Ida S. Scudder, talks of her experience. With staff help, she has materials and handouts. In Maryland, a donor asked for materials to help a friend prepare a presentation. A pastor in Illinois asked for materials for his mission committee hoping they will choose to support CMC. In California, a CMC supporter, exhibited pictures and talked with people at a mission fair.

Every gift to Vellore Christian Medical College Board (USA) counts toward continuation and growth of the beloved CMC. Every gift has its own story, its own personal connection. You might just be that very personal connection. Contact the Board office for information.

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The mission of the Vellore Christian Medical College Board (USA), Inc., in response to the healing ministry of Christ and inspired by the legacy of Dr. Ida S. Scudder, is to provide a focus for excellence and integrity through the support of the wide range of programs of the Christian Medical College and Hospital, Vellore, India.

## Stewardship

Support for Vellore's mission to educate, heal and help the disadvantaged can happen in several ways.

Tribute and memorial gifts may be donated in memory, in honor of, or in celebration of someone or something special in your life.

Many corporations provide matching gifts. Please check with your organization for a matching gift form.

A gift of appreciated securities may offer additional tax savings, allowing your gift to be more than you realized.

Gifts establishing a life income plan may provide a favorably taxed source of income for life as well as a charitable contribution to Vellore as beneficiary.

Naming Vellore CMC Board USA in your will enables your gift to continue into the future.

Annuities, wills and stock transfers may be done through the Vellore Board office.

Donations may be made by check, credit card or through our web site, [www.vellorecmc.org](http://www.vellorecmc.org).

The Vellore Board USA and CMC Vellore are responsible stewards and continue to provide healing support through your gifts. Thank you.

## MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

After meetings and consultations in Vellore with several faculty members and department heads, a decision was reached to participate in an agreement with the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), National University of Singapore and Vellore CMC.

Professor Edward Holmes, Vice Chancellor, UCSD, Professor Kenneth R. Chien, Director Institute of Molecular Medicine, UCSD, Professor John Wong, Dean, National University of Singapore, and Professor Ajit Varki, Co-Director, GRTC, USCD were instrumental in providing a Memorandum of Understanding to work together in the years ahead, opening new possibilities for CMC staff and students; and opportunities for collaborative research and other initiatives.

*CMC Weekly News*