

## Raising horizons

Geoff Watts *London*

"If you ask medical students about their public health teaching you often get the answer that it's rubbish, or they don't enjoy it or get much from it," says Claire Procter, a medical student at Newcastle and currently president of Medsin, "but students really do want to learn about international health issues."

A couple of schools already offer an intercalated bachelors degree in international health—the Royal Free and University College Medical School and Leeds University Medical School. Medsin would like to see more such courses—and, in the meantime, a bit more global health in the curriculum for all students. Asked if these requests find a sympathetic response from medical schools, Ms Procter claims that they do. In one case at least, Medsin has even helped out with ideas about what to put into a course.

### Local action

Although motivated by the bigger picture in health, Medsin is realistic about what its student membership can actually achieve. "Medsin is an organisation for raising awareness about humanitarian issues," says Ms Procter, "It's all about educating ourselves on the different things that affect peoples' health and on what we're going to have to know working as doctors in a global society. But it's also about taking action on projects locally." Hence Medsin's slogan—global vision through local action.

The name of the organisation was originally an acronym for Medical Students International Network, but is now simply its brand name, since the group includes not just medical students but students from other healthcare disciplines.

The local actions that the organisation promotes comprise a clutch of projects and campaigns that are typically started by one branch of Medsin and which, if they prove successful, can be taken up by other branches. The national network spreads the word.

Several Medsin projects focus on what Ms Procter calls "margin-

alised groups"—refugees and the homeless. A Medsin project called Homed, for example, helped recruit students to take part in a recent count of people sleeping rough in London.

Another, entitled Marrow, is the student contribution to the Anthony Nolan Trust. "Its aim is to get students on to the bone marrow register," says Ms Procter, "This is one of our oldest projects and really strong. I think about 25% of people on the Anthony Nolan register now have come through Marrow groups."

The basic life support scheme has students going out into schools to teach cardiopulmonary resuscitation. Sexpression, a peer led education project, aims to tackle teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases: "It involves students who've had training on sexual health issues visiting schools and passing information on. They also talk to other students about sexual issues."

The organisation operates on a shoestring. Students fund themselves, sometimes helped with expenses for travelling and the like by their medical schools. It gets a bit of outside assistance; the BMA, for example, helps out with printing and sponsorship of the national conference. But Ms Procter can still only dream of a regular source of income.

### Open access

Although originally created by and intended solely for medical students, Medsin is now open to others doing any health related degree—or indeed to any student sympathetic to its aims. "In medical careers we're always being taught about the importance of multidisciplinary teams and working together," Ms Procter explains, "A lot of people want to get involved in health issues. There are lots more people out there who could make a real difference to our projects."

"Through Medsin I've developed much more of an idea of where I would actually be useful, what's good and bad about working for non-governmental organisations."

## Medics worldwide: news and opportunities from the IFMSA

Emily Spry, *International Federation of Medical Students' Associations*

**The dangers of procreation:** The developed world has almost forgotten that having kids can be a dangerous business. But, in the developing world, a lack of antenatal care contributes to up to one woman in 10 dying from pregnancy related causes in her lifetime. A statement from the World Health Organization, the International Federation of Gynaecologists, and the International Confederation of Midwives calls for more skilled birth attendants to be trained. "Life threatening complications occur in 15% of all births," says Joy Phumaphi, assistant director-general of family and community health at WHO. "For a mother and her newborn, a skilled birth attendant can make the difference between life and death. Not only can they recognise and prevent medical crises on the spot, but they can refer women for life saving care when complications arise." The theme of the next IFMSA General Assembly is maternal and child health ([www.who.int/reproductive-health/MNBH/index.htm](http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/MNBH/index.htm)).

**Want to be a professor?** Academic medicine is in big trouble. Unless conditions improve, today's students will not want to be the professors of the future. That's the verdict of the International Campaign to Revitalise Academic Medicine, which was launched earlier this year by an international group including the *BMJ* and the *Lancet*. Academic medicine is the place where clinical practice, research, and education meet and is essential for the preparation of the medical workforce of tomorrow. All students with an interest in research and teaching are urged to contact the Student Advisory Group to the campaign, which will express students' views and ideas within the campaign. Involvement is by email, and the group are looking for representatives from universities all over the world, who will be able to pass information back and forth to their peers ([email margaret.rhoads@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:margaret.rhoads@imperial.ac.uk)).

**Familiar yet deadly:** Cars kill two people every minute. But many of the deaths are preventable through tried and tested measures, including design of road junctions and enforcement of speed limits. Relieving the death toll requires cooperation between different sectors of government to implement the best practices and pressure from the people affected. This was the message on World Health Day this year, which ran under the slogan, "road safety is no accident." The organisers recently thanked IFMSA members for promoting the message in many countries. In one particularly striking event, students in Lebanon were trained how to rescue victims from a wrecked car that was brought into the university for the day.

### Travel and educational opportunities

**Egypt:** Ain Shams University Students' Scientific Society presents the 13th Annual International Medical Students' Congress, Cairo, Egypt; 13-16 February 2005; €150 (£104; \$202) ([www.ausss.com](http://www.ausss.com); [info@ausss.com](mailto:info@ausss.com)).

**Thailand:** IFMSA Asia-Oceania Regional Meeting 2005, Pattaya, Thailand; 18-22 March 2005. In March 2004, more than 200 students from all over Asia joined the IFMSA Asian Regional Meeting 2004 in Kuala Lumpur, where they gained new knowledge, skills, and friends, and enjoyed Malaysia's legendary hospitality. All Asian medical students are now invited to the 3rd IFMSA Asia-Oceania Regional Meeting 2005. Register online at [www.rm2005.com](http://www.rm2005.com).