

Badakhshan Medical College, Faizabad

Background:

Located in northeastern Afghanistan, Badakhshan province is one of the remotest regions of the country. Its estimated 1.23 million inhabitants live in villages tucked away in numerous small and large river valleys dominated by high mountain peaks. The province lacks even the most basic health care facilities and social services. The need for properly equipped health centers staffed by trained physicians (MDs) in all district centers as well as rural health clinics in the villages are paramount. Indeed, due to the lack of medical personnel and facilities in all of the 28 districts centers (administrative units) maternal death rate in the province is estimated at 18% and infant mortality stands at 25% annually. The conditions in some of the adjacent provinces of Takhar, Kunduz, Baghlan, Parwan and Kapisa are reported to be similar.

Badakhshan Medical College (BMC) was established in February 1998, following the defeat of Northern Alliance forces in many of the densely populated provinces in Northern Afghanistan where some of the most important institutions of higher education were located. Because of the anti-women and anti-modern policies of the Taliban all women and most young men from the Taliban conquered areas were denied the possibility of continuing their higher education. Some members of the faculty and college students from the provinces of Kunduz, Takhar, Baghlan, Parwan, Kapisa, Balkh and Kabul which were overrun by the Taliban took refuge in Faizabad, the capital of Badakhshan which had become the last stronghold of the Northern Alliance's resistance forces. Under these circumstance some 56 boys and girls schools in Badakhshan province were kept open and running. The graduates of these schools, as well as student refugees from other universities under the Taliban control, were demanding opportunities for higher education in Badakhshan.

The Establishment of BMC:

Students' demands were complemented by their parents and local community elders who appealed to the leaders of the Islamic State of Afghanistan, especially President Burhanuddin Rabbani who is a native of Faizabad, to address the critical need for higher education. In a Presidential Order (No.06) of February 1998, the establishment of Badakhshan Medical College was decreed. New students were recruited for the MPCB (first year pre-Med) class on the basis of competitive examination and some former students of Kabul and Balkh Universities were also absorbed into the new College. Thus, Badakhshan Medical College (BMC) opened its doors on March of 1998 and by spring of 2002, the College had third year medical students studying in Faizabad.

Financial Support for BMC:

All expenses for the College were paid for by the Islamic Government of Afghanistan until the onset of the US War on Terrorism in November 2001. During this period the teaching at the College was done by very well qualified physicians from the Public Health Department and Red Crescent Society (Afghanistan's equivalent of the Red Cross). In addition to Afghan government

support, the College received much needed material and financial assistance from foreign governments and international Non Governmental Organizations (NGO) operating in Afghanistan. These assistance included the following:

1. The government of Turkey provided 149 volumes of medical textbooks, 54 copies of posters and charts for medical education (primarily anatomy and physiology) and built three laboratories (for physics, biology and chemistry) to be used by the first year MPCB (pre-med) students.
2. The government of Iran offered 145 volumes of medical books along with some 7000 copies of student and faculty identity cards.
3. The World Health Organization (WHO) provided 46 volume of medical books, a computer, a slide projector and two other projectors.
4. The representative of German parliament provided 8 three dimensional models of human body, 11 volumes of medical books, 12 copies of anatomical charts and an English language typewriter.
5. Five NGO's helped in building the library book shelves and furniture for the reading area and assisted in English language instruction.
6. About 60 volumes of medical text books were sent by the medical student of Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis (IUPUI). These books were delivered by Nazif Shahrani (July 2002).

The Post-Taliban Developments:

The United States military campaign in 2001, which resulted in the fall of Taliban regime in Kabul, was followed by administrative chaos for some months affecting the BMC operations negatively. The Transitional Administration in Kabul was unable or unwilling to deliver the operating needs of the College for some months. Indeed, during the spring of 2002 the new minister of Higher Education had decided to close the BMC in the hope of consolidating his authority over the higher education system within the country. His decision to close the College was met with protests by students and community leaders in Badakhshan and appeals to president Karzai for keeping the College open. In late summer of 2002, the government in Kabul finally agreed to keep the BMC open. During the months of uncertainty, however, some students and many of the best faculty members decided to transfer to the more established medical schools in Kabul and Balkh Universities.

By the end of the summer 2002 when the dust settled, Badakhshan Medical College was left with some 23 faculty members and 217 students studying in the College. With government support of the College re-instated, the College administrators, faculty and students are optimistic about the future growth of this small institution. The main reason for the Ministry of Higher Education to consider keeping the College open has been the hope that a decentralized medical

education system will offer opportunities for young women and men from the region to receive medical training in order to meet the critical medical needs of the people in the area.

Critical Needs of BMC:

For this small Medical College to survive as a viable institution of medical education so that it can offer the peoples of Badakhshan and adjacent provinces in northeastern Afghanistan a glimmer hope for the future, they require a much needed assistance from the international community. Their basic needs to offer a credible medical education in post war Afghanistan may appear enormous to them, but in reality they are not very substantial by international standards. The wish list submitted by the Director of the BMC includes the following:

1. Laboratory equipment and materials for biochemistry, biophysics, physiology, anatomy and microbiology.
2. Printing, duplicating and publishing equipment: computers, computer printers, video & CD players, TV monitors, and photo copying machines.
3. Fuel (about 220 liters a month) for running the electric generators.
4. Office stationary and instructional materials.
5. Advanced professional training for the faculty (in anatomy, biochemistry, physiology, chemistry, biophysics, histology and microbiology), administrators and lab technicians.
6. Supplementary annual salary (to what the government pays) for faculty and staff (totaling \$65,000.00 a year) and lodging expenses for about 70 students who require dormitory facilities (totaling about \$20,000.00 a year).

The College welcomes visiting faculty from abroad including English language and computer teachers.