

The Link



St John

Sharing news from the Order of St John

St John cholera centres in Zimbabwe



Zimbabwe continues to face its most serious cholera epidemic ever. During December the disease spread across the country and claimed the lives of nearly 2000 people. Latest reports suggest that Harare is still the area of main concern with cases in recent weeks continuing to increase and the situation likely to remain the same until April 2009.

St John Zimbabwe rapidly responded to the crisis and set up 3 rehydration centres, two in highly populated suburbs of Harare and one in the town of Gweru. Volunteers set to work cleaning and looking after patients, ensuring they were receiving the best possible care in such dire circumstances. Cholera is an extremely contagious bacterial disease. It is spread by drinking contaminated water and hand contact with human waste, which is then passed to the mouth. If left untreated it causes severe dehydration and death. However, it is relatively easy to cure, using oral rehydration solution.

The volunteers are provided with food each day and were equipped with protective clothing, cleaning equipment, water purification tablets, rehydration salts - which has been funded by donations from St John organisations around the world. Volunteers worked side by side with hospital staff, Medicin sans Frontieres and UNICEF to combat the disease and save many hundreds of lives. Some volunteers have been working continuously for three months. Teamwork, cooperation and hard work have been the key to their success.

Bill Moore, St John Chairman for Zimbabwe, spent time with volunteers at the centres and spoke highly of their work. *"Our St John volunteers are not only hard-working, dedicated and disciplined but they now realise the importance of what they have been doing. I am very proud of our people"*

A huge problem is that many people are still not aware of how cholera can be prevented. This month St John volunteers will be visiting schools and townships to provide information about the facts of the disease.

My experience at the cholera centre

One afternoon whilst caring for patients at Budiro Cholera Centre, a patient pleaded with me to find his mother from one of the townships in Harare. The sadness in his eyes and pain registering on his face reached my heart. I was compelled not only call his mother on my phone but actually search for the patient's address in the admission book and go and fetch his mother from Kambuzuma. What I discovered there shattered me.

From the houses where my patient lived, raw sewage was flowing freely into backyards. When I got to the address, the mother would not believe that their son actually had cholera. I took her to the Cholera Centre and she managed to see and speak to her son. But sadly it was too late - it was the last time she saw her son. He died the next morning before she could pay him another visit.

I have come to realize that it is the homes of the patients that tell the really devastating story."

Gogo Wazara, St John volunteer



To support St John Zimbabwe, please contact the Order Secretariat on info@orderofstjohn.org

Australia fire disaster

St John volunteers work tirelessly throughout Victoria



"By your very actions you have exemplified the very best of why St John exists."

These were the proud words of Stephen Horton, CEO of St John Ambulance in the Australian State of Victoria after his volunteers have worked tirelessly to support front line fire fighters this February. St John volunteers were on duty day and night for over two weeks in 25 different locations in the worst fire disaster in the country's history.

St John Ambulance treated over 550 patients with 200 of these being acute cases. Additional St John volunteers were flown in from South Australia, New South Wales, Tasmania and The Australian Capital Territory to provide much needed relief. In a message to his volunteers, Stephen also said "Over the last few days I have been incredibly privileged to observe our outstanding volunteers and your contribution in support of the current bushfires tragedy throughout Victoria. You have done yourselves, your families, your communities and St John proud and I thank you for giving of yourself for others."

St John volunteers also provided crucial staffing at the Emergency Control Centre at Mt Waverley which was active around the clock providing sup-

port to ground crews.

The Douglas Donald Recreation Centre (a camp site owned and operated by St John Victoria) was turned into a front line post for CFA fire fighters. Both fire fighters and their equipment have already experienced a number of ember attacks.

Words of thanks and praise to St John volunteers have also come from the Governor General, the State Commissioner and members of the public. "Thank you to all the St John Ambulance volunteers who are looking after the emergency services when returning from the front line. Thank you for looking after those who are looking after us."

The fires in Victoria claimed the lives of over 180 people with 1033 homes being reduced to ash. St John Ambulance Victoria has set up an appeal to support St John members who have been affected by the fires.

For more information or to donate online visit <http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/stjohnvolunteers>

Message from the Lord Prior

The members of St John have learned with horror of the scale of the bush fires in Australia. Throughout the world they have seen, with pride, respect and gratitude, television pictures of St John Ambulance volunteers caring in so many ways for those who have been affected by the fires.

I pay tribute to the quite extraordinary endeavours of the volunteers, which are in the finest traditions of St John. All members of St John in Australia are in the very forefront of our minds.

Update from Gaza

Chairman's report February 2009



I visited the St John Eye Hospital in Jerusalem this February. I was glad to find that the morale and dedication of the staff is as high as ever, despite the devastating conflict in Gaza, the financial problems and the difficulties engendered by a tense political environment.

As you will know, the conflict has quietened with no active Israeli military campaign in Gaza at the time of writing. However, there are constant small engagements on both sides and this makes it dangerous to visit the enclave. Unfortunately, despite our best endeavours, we were unable to get permits to enter the Gaza Strip.

The clinic is now back to seeing patients, after a short break during the conflict itself during which staff were unable to travel to work. Only those hospitals that could accommodate staff were able to continue to see patients during the war. The operating theatre is working again but there remain continuing worries about a high level of operative infections. This needs the attention of our infection control staff, but they too are unable to access the territory and we are restricting surgery until this can be properly assessed.

The staff and patients face many difficulties in reaching the Hospital in Jerusalem. It is common for staff to have to get up at 4 am to have any chance of getting through the checkpoints without long delays and a late arrival at work. There are worrying signs that some checkpoints will no longer be open to West Bankers, putting further strain on the remaining, already overcrowded, access routes. The East Jerusalem Hospitals are working co-operatively to find ways off easing the staff's burden.

The staff remain buoyant and determined that we should improve their working conditions. This remains a priority for the future but we cannot make progress as long as access is difficult and dangerous.

For more information on the St John Eye Hospital, visit their website www.stjohnseyehospital.org.

John Talbot

St John critical during Mumbai seige



St John Ambulance - No. III Maharashtra District, Mumbai were called into action during the horrific terrorist attacks which swept across the city on 26th - 29th November. St John Ambulance volunteers remained close to the Taj Mahal Hotel and provided support in casualty evacuation from the building and First Aid to injured persons over an extended period of time.

St John were on the scene within 10 minutes of the news breaking. 17 volunteers and 35 staff worked for 3 days to look after 90 wounded and evacuate 45 hostages and over 40 dead bodies.

The Patron of St John Ambulance No III, Captain Roderick Sale, spoke of their involvement in the terrifying events "I would like to take this opportunity to record my fullest praise for the consistent efforts of No. III District during the recent Mumbai shootings. In these very tragic circumstances they have provided an invaluable service notwithstanding the considerable danger that they were all in. I am very proud of their efforts."



Wales youngsters make lifesaving trip to Zambia

St John cadets travel to Africa as part of the Order's STAPLE plan

A group of 12 young members of St John Cymru Wales left for Africa on the 9th March, during which they will impart lifesaving first aid training skills to their peers in Zambia.

The 8 day trip was made possible by a grant from the Welsh Assembly Government 'Wales for Africa' initiative. St John Wales has strong organisational links with Zambia through the Order's STAPLE programme.

The group will travel with two St. John Training Development Advisors and Dr Bob Broughton, Chief Commander of St John Wales. The team was selected to spend a week in the region to develop more First Aid trainers within the city of Lusaka, and to pass on their expert First Aid knowledge to St John Zambia volunteers and the public.

First Minister for Wales, Rhodri Morgan, is also supporting the trip. He said: "This will be an experience of a lifetime for these young people. It is a fantastic opportunity for them to practice and pass on their first aid skills to counterparts in Africa as well as seeing how they themselves can work in a challenging new environment. I'm pleased that the Welsh Assembly Government has been able to support this visit through our Wales for Africa programme and the Russell Commission fund for youth volunteering, and I wish them all the best for their trip."

Dr Bob Broughton said: "We believe this trip will be mutually beneficial for St John Wales and our colleagues in Zambia. The experience will be life-changing for the young people going and they will have the opportunity to pass on their essential skills and knowledge to those who need it most."

Asia Pacific Regional Meeting 2009 - Singapore

March 2009 saw the 11 St John organisations from across the Asia-Pacific region come together to share ideas and progress on their activities.

Representatives from St John in Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, India, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, Australia and Pakistan attended workshops on fundraising, communications and strategic planning - to name just a few!

The event was kindly hosted by St John in Singapore. Mr Bobby Lim, Chair of St John Singapore said *"The meeting has built camaraderie amongst the delegates and strengthens international links. The theme "Sharing Good Practice" is very appropriate. It underlines the need for regional and international cooperation and understanding and highlights the Order's efforts to promote such cooperation and understanding."*

Congratulations to St John Kenya who won Volunteer Organisation of the Year 2008 and the Road Safety Award 2008 - for their work training communities who live around high accident prone ('black spot') areas of the highways.



Minister of Transport and Chairman of the Association of Kenyan Insurers present Fred Otieno (far right) and John Mwalagho (far left) from St John Kenya with the 2008 Road Safety Award.

For all the latest news and resources from the Order go to the website www.orderofstjohn.org

If you have any stories you would like to be covered in The Link or you would like any information on any of the news featured in this edition, please contact Gemma Mullick at the Order Secretariat at gemma@orderofstjohn.org or 0044 (0)20 7251 3292

Dates for the diary...

4th- 8th May: Grand Council meeting in Malta

11th-12th May: Mediterrean Regional meeting in Ireland

28th-30th July & 17th-20th Nov: Steering Committee meeting, London

23rd-24th Nov: Caribbean Regional Meeting, Dominica