

Outreach Visit  
19 & 20 March 2010  
Christian Medical College, Vellore  
Report by: Megha, Programme Manager

A visit to CMC Vellore was undertaken by the CEO, Professor Anuradha Lohia and Dr Megha, Programme Manager.

The purpose of our visit was two-fold: to inform researchers at CMC about the IA, its mandate and its schemes, and to engage with clinicians who might be interested in pursuing research.

CMC Vellore is India's premier medical training institute and hospital. They have many firsts to their credit, including Wellcome Trust funding in 19XX. The institute was established in 18XX and since then has been the leading centre of medical training and treatment.

Our host at CMC Vellore was Professor B.S. Ramakrishna, a member of our Early Career Committee and an internationally noted clinician scientist. Professor Ramakrishna had arranged for Professor Lohia's talk to be held at a weekly event at the school called "Quality Circle". Held at 8am on Saturday mornings this session is beamed across the three campuses of CMC via a video link. Professor Ramakrishna had also made tremendous effort to inform researchers of our visit, as evidenced by the large turnout for the talk.

Professor Lohia, in her presentation, outlined our organization and the three Fellowship schemes. She emphasized that clinicians did not require a PhD to apply to the schemes and that eligibility criteria normally applied to basic researchers did not apply to clinicians. An effort was made to stress the flexibility offered in these Fellowships in terms of funding and clinical activities. Many clinicians were under the impression that with the Fellowship they would be prevented from performing clinical duties, vital to keeping their clinical status and skills intact. The audience was also informed about the large remit funded by the India Alliance – from bioengineering to population based epidemiology, and how this fits with the medical population resources available at CMC.

The response to the outreach visit was overwhelming. The designated room was filled to capacity, with extra people standing at the back. There was also an audience present in the rooms where the video link was being displayed. Typical queries were about managing clinical duties with a Fellowship and how research experience of clinicians would be considered relevant. What was apparent is that even in a place like CMC where there is a mix of clinical and basic research there was little interaction/ collaboration between the two. This argues for a more structured approach to building capacity for clinician scientists by augmenting research as part of the medical training and encouraging basic researchers to use clinical/ population based resources to answer fundamental biological questions. A concentrated effort is required to promote clinician scientists. The India Alliance can contribute to this by holding a workshop for clinician scientists so that young medical doctors can be mentored and inspired to take up a career that combines clinical practise and research.