



Ten reasons why Christian medics need CMF

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Whether you're a first year at medical school, or graduated ages ago, it's always good to consider why you are working in medicine. For many of our colleagues and for some of us it was for the money, or because they thought it would be interesting to learn about the human body and meet lots of different people. Perhaps you remember saying at your medical school interview that you wanted to 'help people', and you may even have meant it! Many of us however will have gone into medicine with a clear conviction that we were doing it to serve God.

If we want to serve God through our medicine, what does that actually mean in practice? It could mean earning lots of money to give to our church, and certainly many churches are well-supported by doctors in their congregations. On the other hand, serving God through our medicine may mean being a 'good doctor', striving hard always to get the diagnosis and management right, whilst being caring and compassionate; perhaps patients or colleagues will notice something distinctive about us and ask what our motivation is. For others, it may mean using medicine as a tool to share the gospel, talking about our faith with patients whenever they will listen. Alternatively, we may have gone into medicine with a clear desire to work in the developing world as a missionary doctor, or serve the poor and needy here in the UK.

All of these are valid ways to serve God through our medicine, but what do we do when these desires conflict – when our desire to share our faith interferes with our desire to be seen as a 'good doctor', or our desire to earn money to give to our

church means we ignore a call to serve overseas? What about when ethical issues give us difficult decisions, making it hard to see how we can be a consistent witness to God without compromising our faith?

Wouldn't it be great if there was someone who could help you integrate all of your Christian faith with your medical career – someone who could support and equip you so that you're not just a doctor who happens to be a Christian, or a Christian who happens to be a doctor, but a real Christian doctor?

Most of you who are reading this won't be surprised to hear me say that this is exactly what the Christian Medical Fellowship (CMF) is for. With over 4,500 doctors and 1,000 medical students across the UK and Ireland, CMF is there to equip you as a Christian in medicine – to know who you are in Christ, to serve him through your medicine and to integrate your faith and your medicine at all levels.

From time to time I meet Christian medical students who are keen members of their local church and their university Christian Union (CU), but can't quite see the point in committing to 'yet another meeting' by getting involved with CMF. This article is written exactly for you if you're in that position, and for those of us who are already persuaded of the value of CMF, it will be a useful revision that may help you articulate the reasons to friends who may still need convincing.

I'm going to lay out why I believe that all Christian medical students should be members of CMF, not because we want to build an empire but because we are offering a vital service that no-one else will give you. Church and CU will help you be a better Christian; medical school will help you be a better doctor, but only CMF will help you at the interface. Here are ten reasons why Christian medics need CMF...

1. Christian doctors are in a unique position

All Christians who are in the workplace share certain responsibilities. They must be hardworking and honest, display integrity and share their faith where possible with those around them. We can be great examples to our colleagues by doing these things. But does our work have any wider

impact on society beyond this? It's hard to see how a Christian train driver or shop assistant can be an influence on society through their work, apart from the reasons above.

Yet there are several professions that really do have the potential to shape society for good, to stop the rot and to spread the values of God's kingdom. Examples would include politics, law, media and education – professions where an applied Christian worldview can have a profound impact on the culture we live in. One only has to think of people such as William Wilberforce, whose political career was given to abolishing slavery, or to film makers who have produced such masterpieces as the 'Jesus' film, or 'The Passion of the Christ'.

Medicine is clearly one of these professions. As Christian doctors we can affect society's view of the value of human life, and what it means to care for those who are most vulnerable. We can model compassion in dealing with death and suffering, reflecting God's values. Heroes from the past such as Pasteur, Lister, Sydenham, Barnado and Livingstone remind us what can be done when authentic Christianity and good medicine are combined.

Of course this is a specialised area, and needs the specialised input of those with experience of working out the implications of Christianity in medicine. As medics we are in a privileged position and we must take our calling seriously. CMF can help you fulfill that calling in ways that virtually no-one else can.

This general reason underpins all of the following specific ways in which CMF can help you.

2. Christian medical literature

There is a bewildering array of issues that confront Christians in medicine these days, and it is vital that we are able to give a Christian response to them. Physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia, alternative medicine, embryo research, cloning and stem cells, abortion, contraception and fertility treatments, the ethics of sharing faith with patients, medical mission, sexuality issues and speciesism – the list goes on!

Some of these are issues we will face head on in

the consulting room or on the ward. Others are things that friends and colleagues may discuss with us when they are in the news. In all of them the Christian position is usually a long way away from that of most of our medical colleagues, or society in general. It used to be said that CMF was merely the British Medical Association at prayer, as we would have been essentially in agreement on most other ethical issues! Those days are long gone, however, and Christians are now often quite counter-cultural in their views on many of these issues.

The Bible has much to say on all of these topics, but sadly you can't just open a concordance and look up 'stem cells!' It takes a lot of wise application of the principles of Scripture in order to bring them to bear on these very modern dilemmas. CMF provides reliable, practical resources that will help you understand the issues at stake, apply biblical wisdom and order your medical life accordingly.

Our regular quarterly publications of *Nucleus*, *Triple Helix* and *CMF Files* are all designed to address these issues. We also publish books such as *Matters of Life and Death* (ethical issues at the beginning and end of life), *Hard Questions about Health and Healing*, and *Mad, Bad or Sad?* (Christian views on the nature of psychiatric illness).

We also have three websites:

§ www.cmf.org.uk is our main website with probably the biggest online archive of Christian medical literature in the world, including back issues of all our regular publications, as well as press releases, upcoming events and our book catalogue.

§ www.healthserve.org is a one-stop shop for healthcare mission, with advice and resources on all aspects of overseas service, from electives to long term work.

§ www.ethicsforschools.org contains ethics material arranged according to subject for students of philosophy and and

ethics, or religious studies.

3. National students' conference

The student conference is the biggest event of the CMF year and this year (2008) we considered 'The God we Serve is Able' as we looked at Daniel 1-3. the conference attracts over 300 delegates from all over the UK, Ireland and several other countries. There are top speakers on issues at the interface of Christianity and medicine, with excellent seminars such as 'caring for the dying', 'sex education' and 'suffering'.

There is also the chance to meet with hundreds of like-minded Christian medics and worship our great God together. Booking forms can be downloaded from our website at www.cmf.org.uk/events and if you need any further convincing, just ask someone who's been before - see you there!

4. Supporting local groups

For many students, this will be where the rubber hits the road as they meet regularly on campus with others to work out what it means to be a Christian in medicine. Of the 38 medical schools in the UK and Ireland we have members in virtually all of them, and active CMF student groups in over 30. We can provide speakers for ethics talks, debates or evangelistic events. We have resources to help you organise freshers' events, run a special study module in Christian medical ethics, or put on a Christian graduation service for your final years. We have a number of student staff – doctors who mix medicine with working for CMF and are either based in our London office (like myself or Alex Bunn, our assistant student secretary) or regional staffworkers who support students in one particular region. All of us are available to speak at meetings and give advice on any aspect of running a local CMF student group.

Last year we set up a National Students' Committee (NSC), with regional student reps from around the country to help build up regional links and ensure that grass-roots students are playing

a key role in building up and developing our national student ministry. Avril Stirzaker from Manchester is the student chair of the NSC and would love to hear any suggestions or feedback from you on avrilstirzaker@bluebottle.com - do get in touch with her!

5. Training medical student leaders

All our local groups need committed and effective student leaders in order to flourish. As well as offering specific support when needed, we run an annual Student Leaders' Conference to help new CMF student leaders get to grips with the issues they are facing in their groups. The 2008 conference was in March and you can get further information from www.cmf.org.uk/events.

The Student Leaders' Conference includes things like:

- § Bible teaching on principles of leadership, looking at biblical leaders such as Nehemiah, Moses, or Paul and Timothy;
- § How to plan a programme for your local group;
- § CMF's aims and activities to help you get the bigger picture;
- § The resources we have available to help group leaders;
- § Planning and running evangelistic events;
- § Dealing with the problems that inevitably come up in local groups.

All this is in a great atmosphere of fellowship with CMF student staff, and with other student leaders who are just as nervous as you are about what they're being asked to do in their own medical school!

6. Contact with Christian graduates

If you think back to what has had the most positive influence on your life so far, it may include books, seminars or conferences, but most likely it will have been mainly people. It is so much easier to grasp the theory of following Christ in our lives when we have seen those principles lived out in front of us by real people living real lives, who are far from perfect but have simply walked further along the road that we ourselves are on.

We try to do what we can to enable Christian students to meet and learn from doctors who can

model Christian discipleship in medicine. In each medical school we aim to have a medical school secretary, a CMF graduate member who has committed to supporting local students and may speak at meetings, open their home for students and help local student leaders run their groups. In some cities, clinical students are able to meet with junior doctors and share experiences. We have other local, regional and national events where students can meet with and learn from Christian doctors.

7. **Evangelism training in context**

All of us know we should share our faith, but often we can end up not really knowing how, and just feeling guilty that we're not doing it! Furthermore, as medics we face very specific situations in which to share our faith that must be handled with great tact and sensitivity. CMF provides training days that will leave you feeling equipped and empowered to be a witness where God has placed you.

§ *Confident Christianity* trains participants in the principles of dialogue evangelism – sharing the gospel as the apostles did, 'in words people understand, in an environment where they feel comfortable and with the opportunity for discussion'. It also deals with the common objections people often raise to the gospel, such as suffering, other religions, or perceived problems with the Bible.

§ *Saline Solution* helps doctors bring Christ into the consultation and be 'salt' in a way that is both sensitive and appropriate to the delicate balance of the doctor-patient relationship, without being pushy or offensive.

§ *Answering Other Faiths* uses some of the principles of *Confident Christianity*, but looks more at the worldviews underlying other religions. From there it helps us ask the right questions to understand where our friends are coming from and lead them from the partial and inadequate truth they already know, to the full and sufficient truth of the gospel, in ways that they can

understand and relate to.

We can provide speakers and resources to run any of these events in your area – all you need to do is provide the keen punters!

8. Overseas issues

We are hugely privileged in the UK – excellent medical care and training, lots of financial resources and the support of a well-developed CMF. Many of our brothers and sisters in the developing world cannot claim any or all of these and it gives us a serious responsibility to share with them the things that we have inherited through no special merit of our own. CMF's overseas activities are in two main categories:

§ developing world medical mission – We support students doing overseas electives through electives days, grants and resources on the practicalities and opportunities. All of this can be accessed on our website at [electives](#). We also support and advise many graduate members who work overseas, either long term, or through regular short term trips, as well as those who are considering going in the future.

§ Christian medical associations – CMF is an active founder member of ICMDA, the *International Christian Medical and Dental Association*, which unites nearly 60 national member movements like CMF, and has links with many more. It is a great network for sharing ideas, resources and encouragements, often through regional and world conferences – the 2006 World Congress in Australia was reported in www.icmda.net.

9. Speaking out on ethical issues

You can hardly open a newspaper or turn on a news broadcast these days without hearing about some medical ethical issue or other. Christians in medicine have the opportunity to help shape society by engaging in the media and the democratic process to ensure that good laws are protected and bad ones prevented or restricted.

When we look back to the passing of the Abortion Act in 1967 it

is clear that, although intended to deal with a few 'hard cases', it opened the floodgates to abortion on demand and fundamentally changed our culture's view on pregnancy and the value of pre-natal life. The recent media and parliamentary debates on assisted dying show that, if it were legalised, it would have a very similar effect on end of life issues and it is essential that a clear Christian voice is heard.

CMF provides press releases in response to ethical news and announcements. We make submissions to government consultations on future law changes. We run media training to help members engage with radio and television debate, and put these trained members in touch with media opportunities. We also have a fruitful partnership with our colleagues at the *Lawyers' Christian Fellowship* that is of great benefit in influencing public opinion and lawmaking for good.

10. The student-doctor transition

Leaving the relatively safe world of medical school and heading out into choppy waters as a junior doctor is a time of pressure when many Christians go cold or lose their faith. It is a vital stage when theory must be translated into reality in order for our faith to mature.

We provide a national weekend conference for junior doctors each October, and in many cities there are 'Open House' groups, where local juniors meet informally around a meal to share experiences, discuss issues, support and pray for one another. We have a pastoral care scheme where junior doctors in a new city can be linked with a local senior CMF graduate, to provide a friendly face and a bit of support in the difficult first few weeks.

Summary

So there are ten good reasons why I believe all Christian medical students need CMF. All of them are virtually unique to CMF and will help you live out your faith as an authentic Christian doctor. It's why I would encourage every Christian medical student to join CMF and be part of their local group.

All of us face hard decisions about how to prioritise our time, resources and efforts. Some of us will give more to church, CU, or other valid interests depending on our own situations. But each of us should consider this carefully – what are the unique gifts and opportunities that God has given you to help build his kingdom? Another way to put this is to ask, 'what is it that only you can do?' For those of us who are Christian medics, we are given particular opportunities for God's kingdom that few others have. We need to take this seriously and ask how our medical careers can be used most effectively for his glory.

CMF is here to help you in this, so let me encourage you, if you've not done so already, to join up, join in, and stand with us as we serve God in medicine.

[Visit the website of the Christian Medical Fellowship.](#)