

Frontline

The newsletter for Merlin supporters August 2011



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MEDICAL EXPERTS ON THE FRONTLINE

www.merlin.org.uk/frontline

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Photo: Jenny Matthews/Merlin



Tataouine hospital, Tunisia.

"The Tataouine hospital lacks the equipment and facilities we enjoy, but has a highly motivated and capable workforce who manage to make the best out of limited resources."

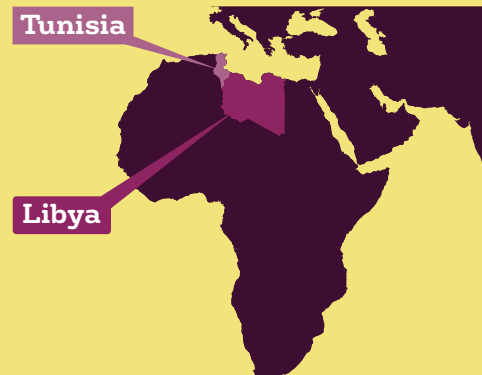
Richard Field, a consultant orthopaedic surgeon at Epsom Hospital, was all set to go out to Haiti to help with Merlin's continuing relief operation. But then he received a phone call from a friend and fellow-surgeon who had just been in Libya, assessing the situation at the Libya-Tunisia border.

"We treated everyone, regardless of what side they were on."

Merlin doctors prepare to amputate the foot of a patient with diabetes at Tataouine hospital, Tunisia.



Photo: Jenny Matthews/Merlin



Merlin surgeons operate on a patient from Libya with abdominal gunshot injuries.

Photo: Jenny Matthews/Merlin

Richard's colleague told him a distressing story of injured refugees from the Libyan war who were in desperate need of medical help. Finally, Richard recalls: "He asked if I could help, and I said I was delighted to."

Soon afterwards, with the full support of Merlin, Richard was heading out to one of the most dangerous places in the world. There he found an unfolding humanitarian disaster on an enormous scale.

Exodus from Libya

"Around 270,000 people from the Nafusa mountain region in western Libya fled to Tunisia when the fighting started," says Richard.

"It was a mass exodus, and some towns and villages in that region were depopulated by up to ninety per cent. This put immense pressure on local services, especially hospitals."

Richard was based at Tataouine regional hospital, near the Libyan border in southern Tunisia. Because of the hospital's location, staff often found themselves close to the frontline, treating those caught up in the fighting. And within hours Richard found himself in the thick of the crisis.

"We generally dealt with the aftermath of skirmishes," he says. "There would be one or two hundred from each side engaged in small-arms fire-fights for a few hours, leaving perhaps four or five dead with others wounded. We treated everyone, regardless of what side they were on."

Long-term impact

For Richard, working at the Tataouine hospital was a remarkable learning experience, in which he gained great respect for the hard-pressed hospital staff.

He says: "In the UK we are blessed with first-rate equipment, fantastic facilities and highly trained staff. The Tataouine hospital lacks the equipment and facilities we enjoy, but has a highly motivated and capable workforce who make the best of limited resources."

Richard has now returned home, having helped with hundreds of potentially life-saving operations. What's more, the impact he has made at Tataouine will continue. Richard has drafted a report describing the situation on the ground and setting out what help and support the hospital needs if it is to cope with the continuing crisis.

The report, commissioned by Merlin, has been shared with a number of organisations, including the Department for International Development, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Health Organisation. Hopefully it will lead to health care improvements at Tataouine and other hospitals that are doing amazing work in the midst of this conflict.

Richard Field's mission to the Libya-Tunisia border is one more example of how Merlin medical experts, supported by you, are saving and changing lives every day.



Photo: Paul Rogers/The Times

Thank you for making their world a better place

Did you know that, every minute of the day, somewhere in the world, nine people are treated by a Merlin health worker? That's a remarkable achievement for an organisation that was founded in 1993 by three young friends in a spare bedroom in London.

In just 18 years, Merlin has grown into the UK's leading medical aid charity, with a reputation for acting fast to save lives when a crisis comes.

We owe this success to some remarkable people – particularly medical experts like Richard Field who go into disaster zones to treat sick and injured people. You may have read on pages 2 and 3 about the truly selfless and courageous work Richard has done on the troubled Libya-Tunisia border.

But we never forget that this work would simply not be possible without generous supporters like you. In the past few months, through your donations, you have helped us

achieve so much – not just in disaster zones like Libya but in many other countries where people fight a daily struggle against poverty and disease.

Your support is getting through to the people caught up in the global food crisis, including the hungry children of East Africa, as you will see on the next page. It is getting through to the mothers of Afghanistan, where we are training midwives to make childbirth safer. And it is also getting through to the people of Sudan, where we are working to help eradicate polio.

These are just a few examples of the work you are helping to make possible.

Thank you so much for all your help, because the difference it makes to people's lives is priceless.

Saving lives in a food crisis

It's truly heartbreaking that, for the first time in history, there are now over a billion people going hungry. Rising food prices, climate change and population growth have plunged the world into a global food crisis. Malnutrition is now the world's biggest killer.



Photo: Frederic Courber/Merlin

Merlin has responded to this crisis with a major appeal to raise money for food programmes across the world. So far our generous supporters have raised £500,000. If you are among those who have given, we thank you very warmly.

That help is already getting through to people in countries like Kenya, where we are running a nutrition programme in parts of the arid Turkana region. Merlin staff travel around far-flung communities to screen children and pregnant and lactating women for malnutrition. Malnourished children are given supplies of Plumpy'nut®, a high protein food supplement, while the women are given iron and folate supplements.

Two-year-old Annette is one of the children for whom this work has been a life-saver. Last

"Thank you Merlin, because if it were not for you, Annette probably wouldn't be alive today."

autumn she was so weak and thin that her family thought she might die. In desperation, her mother brought her to the Lokichar health centre where Merlin staff were visiting.

Annette not only received Plumpy'nut®, but we also gave her mother a supply of corn soya blend porridge to help build up the little girl's strength. Now Annette has put on weight and looks like a different child. As her overjoyed mother says: "Thank you Merlin, because if it were not for you, Annette probably wouldn't be alive today."



Medical consultation with a Merlin doctor in Nepal.



Nepalese children at Merlin clinic.

After years of pain, Pradeep's healthy again

In Nepal, health care services are in short supply, especially if you are poor. And for 10-year-old Pradeep Rokka, this could have had dangerous consequences for his health, if it hadn't been for Merlin.

Pradeep has been suffering from a hernia since he was one and half years old. In the beginning, the swelling used to appear and disappear. But as he got older, the swelling appeared more frequently and it hurt Pradeep when he walked.

When his father Kirtaman brought him to the local clinic, the health worker suggested that Pradeep should go to a hospital in a neighbouring district to have surgery. But as Kirtaman explains: "Our family doesn't have any other income sources except agriculture which does not pay well. I couldn't afford the cost of surgery for my son."

Fortunately for Pradeep, Kirtaman heard a message on the local radio about Merlin's medical referral service, which helps patients needing specialist or hospital treatment. He heard that Merlin's medical team was visiting the local clinic, so he took Pradeep along. The result was that Pradeep was invited to Merlin's medical camp to have the surgery done free of charge. Pradeep has now had his operation and he and his father are both overjoyed. Kirtaman says: "My son is now free of his hernia. We are very grateful to Merlin's medical team, because it wouldn't have been possible without them."



A Merlin doctor attends to a child's eye wound.

"Our family doesn't have any other income sources except agriculture which does not pay well. I couldn't afford the cost of surgery for my son."

Hope returns to the people of Myanmar

When Cyclone Giri devastated parts of Myanmar (Burma) last October, around 200,000 people lost their homes and practically everything they owned.

One of them was Daw Thi May, from the Myebon township, who told us: "The cyclone washed everything away. We had no food, no water and no place to sleep. It was hopeless."

However, hope has started to return, partly due to the work Merlin has done, with your support, since the disaster.

Immediately after the cyclone, we targeted the township of Myebon as one of the worst hit areas.

Since then, we have supplied over 600,000 litres of treated water to 1,904 people living in far flung villages. We have rebuilt six wells, 17 rainwater harvest ponds and two springs and drilled two boreholes, providing clean water for 24 villages. We have distributed 1,694 rainwater harvesting kits to families as well as 800-gallon water tanks to schools. In addition, we have helped to build over 400 latrines for families and another 15 latrines for schools to improve sanitation and help prevent the spread of disease.

All of this has helped people like Daw Thi May to make a new start. She says: "Merlin helped us clean out our wells and gave us clean drinking water. Merlin also gave each household a rainwater harvesting kit, so that we will have access to safe water from our roof when the rains come."

She adds: "We are very grateful for Merlin's help. It has made a big difference to our survival and recovery." Please go on supporting Merlin so we can go on helping people like Daw Thi May to rebuild their lives.



1,904 people with treated water
6 wells rebuilt
400 latrines built
2 boreholes drilled
24 villages with clean water
15 latrines for schools



Rebuilding wells.



←
Distributing rainwater harvesting kits.

Liberia

Life-saving care for Liberia's refugees



Merlin medical staff attend to Ivory Coast refugees.



Bishop Ferguson Transit Camp, Maryland county, Liberia.



Photo: Anna Walton/Merlin

Since last November, more than 187,000 people have fled the Ivory Coast to escape the violence and crossed the border into Liberia.

Many of the refugees are suffering from malaria as a result of sleeping in the open air. Diarrhoea is rife in the refugee camps, and food and clean water are in short supply.

It all adds up to a potential health crisis – which is why Merlin has sprung in to action to make sure the displaced people have the health care services they so desperately need.

In Grand Gedeh county, where around 2,000 refugees are arriving every week, Merlin is supporting 16 health centres and one hospital.

All these places are working flat out to treat patients and save lives. Margaret Williams, a midwife at one of the health centres, told us: “We have one patient who delivered her baby by herself in the bushes and the baby died. Now she has sepsis so we are treating her.”

Without that treatment, it is unlikely that this gravely ill woman would have survived.

Recently Merlin's work has expanded beyond Grand Gedeh to other parts of Liberia where refugees are arriving, including Maryland county, where we are supporting 10 clinics and one hospital.

Although the fighting in Ivory Coast has now ended, many of the refugees in Liberia are settling in for the long haul. With your continued support, Merlin can stay the course too, making sure no refugee goes without access to the health care they so desperately need.

“We have one patient who delivered her baby by herself in the bushes and the baby died. Now she has sepsis so we are treating her.”



Photo: Anna Walton/Merlin

“Merlin has established two clinics in refugee camps, providing urgent medical treatment to many of the 5,000 plus refugees living in each camp”

← Anna Walton with local staff in Liberia.

An interview with...

Anna Walton, Emergency Response Team Programme Manager

Anna joined Merlin in September 2010 and she managed the emergency response for the Pakistan Floods. Most recently she has returned from Liberia where Merlin has been delivering urgent medical aid and treatment at the frontline of the refugee crisis. We asked her the following questions to give you a firsthand account of the situation.

How long has Merlin been in Liberia?

Merlin has been supporting the delivery of health services in Liberia since 1997. We work closely with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare; renovating facilities, providing medicines, equipment and incentives to health staff, capacity building and training local partners and government authorities.

What health services is Merlin providing?

Merlin was well positioned in both Maryland and Grand Gedeh counties to provide emergency life-saving health services to the Ivorian refugees, as we were already working in two hospitals, two health centres and 24 health clinics. The hospitals and health centres as well as 15 of the health clinics have been significantly affected by the refugee influx.

In addition, Merlin has established two clinics in refugee camps, providing urgent medical treatment to many of the 5,000 plus refugees living in each camp. We are also operating

three mobile health teams which regularly go to the border, to help those who are seriously ill or injured to make it to the hospital or clinics.

What are the most frequent medical needs you have been treating?

In the first few weeks of the refugee influx into Liberia, we had to deal with a number of trauma injuries caused by bullet and knife wounds. The main illnesses have been malaria, acute respiratory infections, watery diarrhoea and malnutrition.

How long do you envisage Merlin's services to be needed by the refugees?

The Ivory Coast is still unstable and it will be some months at least before the refugees can return. We expect to continue providing health services to the refugees until the end of 2011 and into 2012. I would like to thank our supporters for their generous response to our Ivory Coast appeal, which is helping to make this possible.



Photo: Simon Rawles/Merlin

“Merlin, you are a true friend”

Lorenzo Dorr is a Primary Health care Co-ordinator for Merlin in Grand Gedeh County, Zwedru, Liberia. Here, he shares some of his own poetry inspired by his work.

*You are more than just a helper,
you are a true friend,
What more can I say you are?
When I am so desperate,
You are always there.*

*You are an African woman,
For her a child is not owned by single parents,
You are all over where there is trouble,
Where people need help,
Where people look for someone to care.*

*How can I describe you?
You are more than just a helper,
You are a true friend,
All in the villages of Grand Gedeh your name is
on the lips of the young, old and the elderly,
Some are telling of how you rescued a pregnant
woman in prolonged labor,
Some are telling of how a baby with severe
malaria was quickly transported to
hospital by you,
Other are telling of how a baby was born on
the ambulance from a faraway community,
You are more than just a friend,
you are a true friend.*

*You made many weak communities strong
through your teachings,
Children are being named after your staff,
Oh Merlin, you are more than just a helper,
You are a true friend.*

*Your tracks will serve as memories
of your legacy,
In the rain you are there,
In the sun you are there,
In the darkest of nights you are there.*

*When the roads were impassable,
When other agencies were almost discouraged,
That was when your spirit was lifted,
Lifted to save lives,
Because you are more than just a helper,
You are a true friend.*

*“God knows our suffering,
For He brought you to us,
God shall find your replacement”,
These are the household words,
For you are more than just a helper,
You are a true friend.*

More news from Merlin



As a token of thanks for all the support you have given us, we would be very pleased to send you a fascinating booklet.

It contains a series of 12 articles from *The Times* about our work around the world. Last year, Merlin was one of the beneficiaries of The Times Christmas appeal, which resulted in £220,000 being raised for Merlin. If you do not already have a copy of the booklet, please 'phone Emma Wilding on 020 7014 1719 or email emma.wilding@merlin.org.uk to request one.

Want to fundraise for Merlin?

If you are thinking of fundraising for Merlin – however big or small, however wacky or unusual – please get in touch with Sarah Johnson on 020 7014 1717, who will support you in any way she can. Whether you hold a coffee morning with friends, guess the number of sweets in a jar at work, or hold a charity day at school, we would love to hear from you. Every penny counts!

If you would like a copy of our Fundraising Pack – then please contact Sarah. It's full of great ideas to help you with your fundraising. You can also download it from our website: just go to www.merlin.org.uk/what-you-can-do/fundraise

Christmas cards for sale!

Please find enclosed this year's Christmas card order form. All the profits from sales will go straight to help Merlin save lives.



Photo: Allison Spittle/Merlin

↑ Merlin supporters at the 2011 London Marathon.

Virgin London Marathon 2012 – Join team Merlin!

Now is the time to apply for your chance to pound the streets of London on Sunday 22nd April 2012. The Virgin London Marathon is the biggest, and arguably the most exciting fundraising event of the year, so why not take on the challenge for Merlin? Wear our running vest, spread the word, and help us support those who need our help.

An application form can be downloaded online by visiting the challenge event page at www.merlin.org.uk. Alternatively please contact Sarah Johnson on 020 7014 1717 or email challengingyou@merlin.org.uk



← Dan Welburn smiling as he runs the 2011 London Marathon, raising money for Merlin.

Photo: Allison Spittle/Merlin

Your legacy

Your legacy of life for the next generation.

There can't be any gift more precious than the gift of life. Yet millions of people around the world face a daily struggle to survive, because they don't have access to healthcare. Parents see their children die in infancy from diseases that could easily be treated. Mothers die far too frequently in childbirth. And diseases like HIV/AIDS and cholera kill thousands of people every day.

If this is something you would like to help change, please consider leaving a gift to Merlin in your will. Your gift – of whatever amount – could help save many lives in the future. It could help to build clinics, and train midwives and health workers, so that whole communities can have access to healthcare. It could mean that generations of children can grow up strong and healthy.

It is easy to leave a gift to Merlin in your will, or to change your existing will to add a gift to Merlin. How much you choose to give is entirely up to you – but you can be sure that every pound will make a lasting difference.

Thank you.

Registered charity numbers: 11351116 1016607



Photo: Paul Rogers/The Times

“In a situation like this you are saving probably dozens of lives a day.”



Photo: Miguel Samper/Merlin

Please send me a copy of the *Merlin Legacy Guide*

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Tel: _____

Email: _____

Please complete this form and return in the freepost envelope provided to:
Merlin, FREEPOST RLZE-EGYR-JAGH, 12th Floor, 207 Old Street, London, EC1V 9NR. (No stamp required).