



Paul Harrison Award 2012

The Paul Harrison Award of the Christian Medical College is presented to alumni for significant, steadfast and selfless service in the broad field of health, in situations of need or neglect. This year Dr. Mary Ramasamy joins this honoured company.

Mary O, as she is popularly known, was born in 1956 in the family of the Reverend A. C. Oommen who was the beloved chaplain of CMC. Profound religious conviction, courageous and selfless practice of that faith in action, and solicitude for those in need was in her genes. It is the thorough going expression of these values in diverse situations and over a life time that we honour today through this recognition.

On graduation from Vellore in 1979, Mary requested permission to do her service commitment at a tribal health centre at Kummankurichi in the Kalrayan Hills of Tamil Nadu. This is a remote hilly region where the parents of Dr. Paul Brand had worked as missionaries all their lives. Mary worked here alone for two years, providing primary health care at the clinic and in the scattered villages. The bonds she developed with the trustful tribal people, and the tranquillity and beauty of such surroundings, have been a magnetic influence in her life.

Mary returned to her alma mater to train for a postgraduate diploma (DGO) and later a doctorate (MD) in Obstetrics and Gynaecology. Equipped thus, by experience and by expertise, she joined the Christian Fellowship Hospital in Oddanchatram, a bond that endured for over two decades. This was an ideal setting for Mary to deliver a person oriented and holistic type of obstetric care, insisting on continuity of care from early pregnancy through delivery and on to the postnatal period as necessary. She was particularly drawn to patients from disadvantaged and remote communities who received, through her, affordable care without dilution of high quality. Mary also moved out of the hospital to visit peripheral health centres to provide antenatal care at primary health care levels, supporting health workers in the field.

In 1986, Mary married Dr. Rajkumar Ramasamy, a brilliant clinician, trained in the UK, who was drawn to Oddanchatram through an early life changing exposure. Though he excelled in hospital based clinical care, ingeniously adapted to the conditions in Oddanchatram, his heart was in responding to needs and challenges outside the hospital walls, and more especially in the unreached remote areas. Their shared values brought Mary and Rajkumar together. Soon after marriage they explored the challenge of tribal health care by working for a year at the Gudalur Adivasi Hospital in the Nilgiris District. Rajkumar then moved out to establish a Primary Health Centre in a remote village called K.C.Patty amidst the forested lower Palani Hills, about 40 kilometres from Oddanchatram. Mary continued in CFH, but giving special attention to patients referred from K. C. Patty and joining the work and the rustic life there over weekends.

In 2009, Mary made a difficult and life-changing decision to move full-time to K. C. Patty. While the health centre provides back up medical care, most of the health care at the village level is through village health workers trained at the centre and supported by arduous field visits by Mary or Raj. Their financial base is meagre and uncertain. Often, Mary has to work alone while Raj is away for significant periods due to compelling family reasons. But slowly the health care programme and other social initiatives are bringing about radical changes in the health status of this vulnerable community.

Mary – the person she is and what she does – embodies the rare values of simplicity, integrity, humility and endurance, undergirded by a deep, quiet and all-encompassing trust in God, values that resonate with the heritage and aspiration of CMC. And she has consistently lived out these values, through the 33 years since her graduation, and in all the contexts and situations that life has led her to.

CMC is proud to claim Mary Ramasamy as an alumna and to honour her with the Paul Harrison Award for the year 2012.

Dr. Mary Ramasamy

DIRECTOR

Vellore

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PRINCIPAL