

## **The College Motto award 2019**

### **Dr. Helen Samuel**

Dr Helen Samuel joined CMC Vellore for her MBBS training in 1994 as the Govt. of India candidate from Andaman & Nicobar Islands. While classes typically began in July of each year, Helen joined the rest of her batchmates in September and found herself having to play “catch-up”. She was very quiet, maybe even shy but always had a smile on her face.

After she completed her MBBS, Helen went back to the islands and joined the Directorate of Health Services in October 2001. Her first posting in the Govt. service was at the Primary Health Centre in Hutbay, Little Andaman. This PHC is in the capital of Little Andaman, and it takes 6-8 hours by ship to reach Port Blair from this location. The PHC is a 35-bedded facility with a daily OPD attendance of 180-200 patients, provides basic laboratory and imaging facilities and caters to a population of 15,000 people. As a young doctor called to serve in a remote area, Helen knew that she had her work cut out for her and soon realised that her training in CMC was coming in handy all the time! After the Tsunami hit in December 2004, the islands were devastated, and the losses were enormous. Helen was involved in rebuilding and restoring the PHC that was razed to the ground. It took several months to get the medical centre up and running.

“We all lost so many loved ones.... None of our houses survived the Tsunami, so I could relate to the peoples’ state of mind”, said Helen as she chatted with a friend. Helen served at the Hutbay PHC for 14 years and was the only doctor in the PHC for 8 of those 14 years. This meant having to be available for 24 hours a day, seven days a week and missing out on several family events, sacrificing sleep, food and even church time.

As part of her medical care, Helen took care of an indigenous tribe called the ‘Onge’ people, having to cross a creek full of crocodiles and then out in the open seas for 20-30 minutes to reach their homes. This seemed doable when the weather was fair but during the rains and thunderstorms - “I still have nightmares”, says Helen. She is so thankful to God Almighty for keeping her team and herself safe during those stormy days. Helen received the Lieutenant General Commendation in 2010 for her work in this medical centre. Her work with Hansens’ disease patients in the area led to another award for ‘Best Doctor - National Programmes for Elimination of Leprosy’ as she detected and treated the most number of patients in the area. These awards were the least of her priorities.

In 2015, Helen was transferred to Campbell Bay, Great Nicobar, where she was able to change clinical practice in several areas, particularly in Obstetrics care. She was able to change the norm of all antenatal care being referred to Port Blair and trained her team to provide the same care in their PHC. She organised Family Planning camps every year, the beneficiaries ranging from 50-200 people each year.

Through the years, she has been unable to leave her PHC even for short periods. She says “the internship in CMC helped me to be ready for this”.

Apart from her rigorous clinical work, Helen is an administrator and leader; these roles come with their additional responsibilities. She has been responsible for all the clinical services, administrative work, drawing and disbursing for 2 PHCs and ten sub-centres.

The local aviation services provide helicopters to get across islands and depending on the distance between the islands and refuelling services; these choppers can take 3-9 passengers on a flight. The tickets for these helicopter rides are issued on the previous day, and it is not easy to get a ticket, especially for a patient in dire need of higher medical care. Helen fought the system and was responsible for ensuring that two air tickets were ear-marked for patients when the helicopter services started in 2007/08. This was an uphill task, but in the end, it all worked out in the best interest of the patients who were in need.

For the past 20 years, Helen has been working tirelessly to serve the people of the islands; her work has dramatically blessed the local people and the government. Helen has numerous challenging and inspiring stories, many of which seem impossible for a single person to have managed, but she attributes it to God above and her Alma Mater. She says after the training she received in CMC; she cannot think of any other way to practice!

Helen Samuel has demonstrated the true meaning of our motto, "Not to be ministered unto, but to minister", by her selfless work in a needy part of India. Her life is an inspiration to all the young graduates of the Christian Medical College who want to fulfill the vision of Aunt Ida.

The CMC Alumni Association is proud to present the College Motto Award 2019 to Dr. Helen Samuel.