

HSFB Museum Exhibition Opening 15th Dec 2012

Address by Mr. Humphrey Metzgen, President HSFB

Welcome everyone and a special acknowledgment to our patients, benefactors and the staff of the Heart & Stroke Foundation of Barbados.

It is very appropriate that we are here at this at this venue tonight. The Barbados Museum is not only the repository of artifacts, a place of study but also an institution that has recorded the history of our lives and surrounding culture. It opened its doors in 1933; making next year its 80th year. I believe that it is successfully fulfilling its brief and more. There are however a couple of other reasons why we are here that should be mentioned: It is a perfect environmental setting for this evening event. Our presence here sets the stage for wonderful experience while cementing a closer relationship between our two great institutions.



I should also mention that in addition to being a director of the Heart & Stroke Foundation I am also a member of the museum's Council and Chair its Finance and General Management Cttee.

Tonight we are here to launch the opening of a small exhibition on medical history and the work of the Heart & Stroke Foundation of Barbados. The exhibition will be open to the public on Monday and will remain open until the end of Jan.

On undertaking this project I found some surprising information. Let me share some of these with you: Over the centuries many of the medical discoveries and related technologies came about by personal initiatives. Collaboration with other scientists, certainly at the early stages of

their discoveries, seemed nonexistent. There may well be good reasons for this; poor communications and the sheer geographical size. It also appeared that many of the inventions were around for some time before being widely used ; some might even say waiting for an application. Passion and clear vision were certainly pre-requisites of these pioneers.

- Take for example the stethoscope. The French physician Rene Laennec in the 18th century invented this piece of equipment when he felt it was inappropriate to place his ear on his female patients' chests'.
- Physician Chios (250-304 B.C.) was the first to discover that the heart functioned as a natural pump.
- Years later Galen argued that the heart constantly produced blood. However, it was William Harvey's (1578-1657) discovery of the circulation system in 1616 that revealed there was a finite amount of blood in the body and that it circulated in one direction.
- In 1903, physiologist Willen Einthoven invented the electrocardiograph which measures electric current in the heart.
- More recent times, the German surgeon Werner Forssmann, in 1929 invented cardiac catheterization, a now common procedure.
- Finally (and this is for tennis players) I am told that to see how hard the beating heart works, you just have to squeeze a tennis ball tightly. Source unknown.



Jump a few decades and back in Barbados in the 1970's things were different. Here the Chief Medical Officer had identified that heart disease as the number one cause of death in Barbados. This was an important development and soon after the QEH started a cardiac service.

Two visionaries decided to do something about this news. They were: Dr Trevor Hassell (now Professor Hassell) who was the Head of the Department of Medicine and Cardiac Unit at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. The other was Dru Symmonds, a business executive from Barbados.

Together they founded the Heart Foundation of Barbados in 1985 with the aim of educating the public, providing a programme for heart rehabilitation and emergency cardiac care. In 2006 the word Stroke was added to the name and it became the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Barbados.

Today the Foundation is 27 years old , a registered charity and is best known for its work in two areas: Cardiac Disease Prevention and Rehabilitation and Emergency Cardiac Care Programme. Last year the Foundation made over 2900 patients contacts in its cardiac disease preventive programme and a further 1,200 individuals from various walks of life were trained and certified

in the emergency care programmes. These are significant numbers compared with the handful of patients in 1985 and are a reflection of the growing need for health care in our community as well as the dedication of our medical, professional and supporting staff.

To cope with this demand has meant a significant call on our capital and operational expenditure. Next year we will be expanding our HQ premises facilities to accommodate more patients. We will also bring on board new equipment to ensure we can maintain our high standard of care. Furthermore we are also planning to launch a pilot nationwide screen service to detect early sign of cardiac disease.

It is estimated that of Barbadians, aged 20 years and older, 38,000 are living with high blood pressure, 90,000 are overweight, 19,000 are diabetic and one person suffers a stroke every day. The projection is that heart disease will cause 3 times more death and disability than infectious diseases over the next 20 years in this region.

We are very fortunate that the Foundation is the only country in the Caribbean (other than Mexico) that has achieved the coveted accolade of the American Association of Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Rehabilitation accreditation; making it possible for doctors and hospitals to refer their patients to us with confidence in our service. In Barbados, outpatient Cardiac programmes can only be provided by a government-approved facility and we are the ONLY such facility to administer such care.

Even with these successes the challenges ahead are enormous.

The good news is that we are living longer, but only for those that have signed up for a better healthcare programme. Today if you live in Japan or Singapore you can expect to live to 82, the highest in the world. The UK expectancy is 79 yrs, USA 78 yrs, St Lucia 76 yrs, Barbados 74 yrs, St Kitts 73 yrs, Trinidad & Tobago 71 yrs, Belize 68yrs. The country with the lowest life expectancy is Angola at 38 years and this is probably due to factors other than health.

If you are fortunate to live in the Western hemisphere, the statisticians tell us that we stand a good chance of living longer by 12 years. Put another way someone age (say) 50 today is in fact only a mere 38 years old. Logically therefore should we be considering abandoning chronological age as a form of measuring time and substitute this with a biological rating as the true age? If so does this mean that birthdays might become a relic of the past? I think our historian friends might be bit upset with this. Perhaps we should keep our museum friends in the medical loop.

My dear friends I welcome you to our first exhibition and may I thank the many people who have made tonight a reality. Thank you again and happy Christmas and a very, very healthy new year.

Humphrey Metzgen
President of HSFb (15.12.2012)

