

Canadian Vellore Ludhiana Committee

Supporting CMC Vellore and Ludhiana since the 1940's

Committee News

We, the members of the Vellore Ludhiana Committee, are deeply saddened to have to inform you, our supporters, of the loss of our chairperson of many years, Helen Flanagan. She waged a courageous battle against cancer during the past year and continued to act as chairperson until this past January when she informed the committee that she would not be able to continue on due to her declining health.

Helen called a meeting of the committee near the end of January in order to determine what should be done in light of her circumstances and in less than two months she was no longer with us. On March 21, 2012, she passed away peacefully at home with her husband Gordon and daughters Diane and Anne-Marie by her side.

We take comfort in the knowledge that she is now completely fulfilled, completely healed and experiencing the peace and joy of being in the presence of her saviour, Jesus Christ, whom she served here so faithfully.

Helen brought much to the committee in the years that she served. She first joined shortly after her mother, Zelma Virgin, passed away in 1985. Zelma had served on the committee for many years and Helen stepped into the vacancy left behind. It wasn't long before the committee appointed her to be the chairperson and she used all her background, understanding and abilities to provide leadership and direction.

In 1997 she became a senior assistant to a Federal government minister in and had to resign from her position on the committee because serving as an officer of a charitable institution was seen as a "conflict of interest". When she retired in 2003 she rejoined the committee and continued to serve until this past January.

Helen was born September 22, 1940 in Dehra Dun, north central India. Her parents, Dr. William Virgin and wife Zelma were there serving as medical missionaries. She spent her early years, up to the age of about 14 mostly in India in numerous locations including Dehra Dun, Dhaka (now in Bangladesh), Ludhiana and the Himalayan foothills town of Mussoorie where she attended Woodstock School. During this time the family also travelled to the UK for her father to continue medical-surgical studies and to Canada for furlough time.



"My work is for a King." Dame Edith Brown, founder of CMC Ludhiana

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All this exposure to many places, cultures and the challenges of providing medical care in less than ideal circumstances brought great insight and understanding when it came time to providing leadership for the Vellore Ludhiana Committee. No one had to explain what it was like to offer medical care in India, it was already understood.

When her family returned to Canada for a year's furlough in 1954-55, Helen remained in Canada to complete her high school education and subsequent nursing training.

She graduated from Riverdale Collegiate Institute in 1959 as an "Ontario Scholar" with the highest marks in the school and then entered Toronto Western Hospital School for Nursing, graduating in 1962. She married Gordon Flanagan that same year. It wasn't long before she became a head nurse and her training and background in nursing and nursing administration became invaluable resources for the committee. She possessed wonderful gifts of organization and administration but all her skills, knowledge and wisdom were really only the "tools" she used. Her purpose was to serve the God she loved with the gifts He had given her by loving and caring for His creation. Leading the Vellore Ludhiana Committee was only one of the many practical ways she did this.

We would ask you to keep Gordon, Diane and Anne-Marie in your prayers as they make the difficult transition to life without Helen. Gordon serves as our treasurer and has indicated his desire to continue in this role. We are very thankful for that!



Helen & Gordon



Anne-Marie & Helen



Helen & Rev. Dr. Lou Knowles (former chair of The Vellore Foundation, USA)

The Future of the Committee

When the committee met in January and Helen informed us of the need to step down our first item to address was whether to attempt continuing on as a committee or to commence an orderly closing of the work here in Canada. If we were to continue, the committee would need to appoint new leadership. After some discussion regarding the pros and cons of continuing, Douglas Virgin volunteered to take on the position of chairperson should the committee wish to continue. A motion was made and passed to appoint him as the interim chairperson with the agreement to have further discussion regarding the future of the committee at a subsequent meeting to be held as soon as possible.

This second meeting took place in early March and a decision was made to continue the committee with the proviso that significant effort would be made to revive the work over the next three years. If after that time no substantial progress had been made, an orderly shut down would be initiated.

A number of specific goals were agreed on including using technologies such as Skype and teleconferencing to enable current committee members who have not been able to physically attend meetings, whether due to distance or other reasons, to once again contribute to planning and direction. New members are to be sought out to expand the committee, bring in additional skills and introduce fresh ideas to promote and raise awareness of the tremendous work that both colleges and hospitals do.

The executive committee would welcome volunteers who feel they would like to contribute in this way or who know of persons that might. Please let us know.

Ludhiana News

Last autumn we received many notes of thanks from nursing students who were recipients of scholarship money received as a result of funds sent by the committee. MBBS students were also awarded assistance from the William and Zelma Virgin Memorial Scholarship. Assisting students in completing their healthcare training is very much in keeping with the original vision Dr. Edith Brown had when she started her work to fill the desperate need for medical care in India.

In discussions with Myrtle Ashwin, wife of the late Dr. James Ashwin, the committee made a decision to establish a scholarship in physiology in his honour. Dr. Ashwin went to Ludhiana in 1953 to begin teaching physiology at CMC as it was a new requirement in order for the school to upgrade and offer the MBBS degree. He taught from 1953 – 1955 but was tragically stricken with polio. After a long recovery period in India and England he returned to Canada to continue rehabilitation. Here, in spite of never being able to walk again, he first taught at the University of Saskatchewan and then later took a position at the Canadian Federal Bureau of Drugs.

Vellore News

Over the past year the committee has been very pleased to receive donations designated for specific purposes.

In this last week of June we have sent funds:

- to establish a new nursing scholarship to be awarded annually in honour of Gladys Hamilton who taught nursing there from 1949 to 1967
- to the Development Office Emergency Fund. This fund helps economically disadvantaged patients who need urgent life saving treatment. “We use it mainly for patients needing expensive surgery but we are also flexible, sometimes helping ICU patients especially, those on costly antibiotics.”
- to the MBBS batch (class) of 1958-59 alumni project to build & equip an Advanced Medical Simulation Laboratory which was inaugurated and dedicated on March 3, 2012 in the Paul Brand Building.

The Simulation Laboratory is designed and equipped like an ICU room. It has two high fidelity patient simulators, the SimMan 3G and the SimBaby and an obstetric task trainer called PROMPT.

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The SimMan and SimBaby simulators provide healthcare professionals and students the opportunity to learn and practice treatment in a realistic environment. The mannequins have the ability to talk while care is being provided, thus enhancing the realism. Additional features include vital signs that automatically respond to blood loss and treatment with medications. Heart, lung and abdominal sounds that can be heard by a stethoscope and it provides bleeding simulation at multiple sites. Intubation, ventilation, tracheostomy, intercostal chest drainage and other emergency medical procedures can be performed on the SimMan and SimBaby.

These features enable it to be used in advanced cardiac life support training as well as various patient scenarios and rare medical conditions.



SimMan 3G in the Advanced Medical Simulation Laboratory

In India Today – the Nielsen sixteenth annual survey of the best colleges in the country, Christian Medical College, Vellore was ranked second in Medicine.



In the words of founder, Dr. Ida Sophia Scudder, "We need those who can take up the torch ... and make Vellore Medical College one of the outstanding medical institutions today and, shall I say, in the world."

Today the vision of Aunt Ida, as she was popularly known, has come to fruition - as you can see from the side bar!

	2012	2011	2010
1	All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi	1	1
2	Christian Medical College, Vellore	4	2
3	JIPMER, Puducherry	7	4
4	Armed Forces Medical College, Pune	5	3
5	Maulana Azad Medical College, Delhi	2	5
6	Grant Medical College, Mumbai	9	9
7	Madras Medical College, Chennai	18	12
8	University College of Medical Sciences & GTB Hospital, Delhi	3	11
9	St. John's Medical College, Bangalore	20	8
10	Institute of Medical Sciences, Varanasi	15	13

National rankings are derived from a combination of perceptual and factual scores. Colleges that did not provide factual information were not ranked.

In Closing

The committee would like to establish an annual nursing scholarship at CMC Ludhiana in honour of our former chairperson, Helen Flanagan. Ludhiana is where her father served for many years. We feel this would be a fitting way to celebrate her because both nursing and India were a very large part of her life and she cared very deeply about both of them.

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