

**HEALTH AND WHOLENESS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY
CONFERENCE ORIGINS AND OVERVIEW
DR. DANIEL E. FOUNTAIN**

Jesus gave us a three-fold mandate

- Preach the good news of eternal and abundant life
- Teach the laws of God and his will for every aspect of life
- Heal those who are sick

In Christian health ministries, all three are or should be combined. Health ministries involve all three of these mandates. “We are saved by hope,” wrote the Apostle Paul in Romans 8, and the living hope of eternal life - meaning and purpose for present life, and the joy and peace of a relationship with Jesus - are beneficial for health. Community health – people developing living conditions and behavior patterns that favor health for themselves and the community - comes from God’s Word and the faithful application of the laws he has given us. Compassionate care following the model of Jesus helps restore health to those who are ill and is a marvelous testimony of the love God has shown us in Christ.

Medical missions first opened the doors to both medicine and the gospel in many parts of Asia and Africa – China, India, the Congo, and so on. Millions have come to faith in Christ because of the loving care of Christian health personnel. The training of nurses and primary health personnel has presented marvelous opportunities for making disciples of young people as servants of God.

Medical missions, however, have largely followed the evolution of modern medicine that has been increasingly focused on the physical aspects of medicine and health, and has moved away from an understanding of wholeness and of community relationships that promote health. Rapidly escalating costs of medical care have influenced many missions to downsize or abandon medical mission efforts. Although government and private health services have greatly expanded, the lack of compassionate care and concern for the poor has isolated institutions from the needs of vast numbers of people.

In my travels on several continents I find that my Christian health colleagues all agree that God has made us as whole persons. Yet few put this into practice in the hospital or clinic. Many agree that people are of paramount importance, but instead of building relationships with them, we preach at them, show them a film, and move on. We agree that the community must be involved in health care, but our individualistic philosophy has not equipped us with relational skills to work with communities. And in our separate missions, we keep separate, knowing only what our group is doing while largely ignoring what other missions may be doing of a similar nature and what our host-country Christian colleagues are attempting to do on their own.

The purpose of this consultation is to rediscover biblical paradigms of health and healing and to seek practical strategies for putting these into effective practice. We do not start with a blank page, for in reality a growing number of Christian health ministries in numerous countries have been learning from God and from the sciences of medicine, sociology, and anthropology about wholeness of people and communities, about healing people as whole persons, and about the will of God for the health of people.

The methodology we will use in this consultation is to listen to reports of many such programs, ministries that are seeking to apply biblically sound and scientifically valid principles of healing and of community health. It is our hope that, by doing so, we will:

- reflect on new ways to bring the good news of life and health to people
- forge partnerships among all of us from all countries represented here that will increase our impact on the lives and health of people
- develop new and more effective strategies for reaching the hearts, minds, and lives of people and drawing them into the kingdom of God.

The discussions will center around five themes:

1. The meaning of health and wholeness
2. The relationship between health ministries and church planting and growth
3. Forging partnerships with the right people and groups
4. Learning important lessons from the past and from each other
5. Relationships between ministries generated in the “South” and those generated in the “North”

Let us commit ourselves before the Lord to work together toward these ends so that God’s ways may be known on earth and his saving health among the nations (Psalm 67:2).