

## **Costa Rican foundation points to holistic health**

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

The average visit to a doctor's office involves checking on physical conditions such as blood pressure and temperature, and involves examination of the heart, lungs, eyes, ears and other vital organs.

Hospital visits are even more intense as medical practitioners work to cure physical ailments, provide treatment for heart attacks or operate on organs or parts of the body affected by cancer, trauma or other problems.

Now, however, some doctors and community activists are seeking to expand health care from just concern with the physical to include mental, social, environmental and spiritual aspects as well.

"Integral or holistic health is an effort to cover the entire context of human life as God has given it to us," said W. Dayton Roberts, a retired missionary who lives in the San Jose area. "We are each expected to live out our existence on this planet in a context which includes five areas, the body, mind, spirit or soul, personal relationships and the environment."

To help focus public attention on a more holistic approach to health care, a group of Robert's extended family has formed The Roberts-Strachan Institute of Integral (Holistic) Health. The purpose of the organization is to promote the concept of holistic health and to help health providers and other segments of the community to recognize the importance of integrating these broader concepts into medical care.

"The different areas of life are interdependent," explained Bary Roberts, Dayton's son and a member of the foundation's board. "Our cultural process leads us to make each of them independent."

"The psychiatrist is better than the simple doctor of medicine for the body," Dayton Roberts said. "The Christian doctor is better than one who overlooks the spiritual side of things. People need a pastor or counselor as often as or more so than just a medic. Hence, our need for social services."

"Everything we need for living comes to us through the environment, the air, water, food and energy," he added. "Good health involves all of these areas and must be measured in each and all."

The foundation's objective for this year is to promote the concept of holistic health in Costa Rica through the various publications and the sponsorship of related activities.

"We are preparing educational materials which will be used in public and private schools and in churches," Bary Roberts explained. "We are developing a curriculum for use in Clínica Bíblica to help train their personnel."

Working with Clínica Bíblica, the foundation wants to help coordinate projects that will raise consciousness concerning these issues and develop programs to help integrate the various disciplines.

Bary Roberts said that the foundation is working to begin a recycling project that, he said, would be a win-win situation for industries that produce disposable products, the government agencies that must deal with trash collection and the community which will be a much cleaner place to live and work.

Projects in the coming years will include establishing links between organizations and people who have ministries in the area of holistic health in 2006, investigating and analyzing holistic health needs and looking for innovative solutions in 2007, and sponsoring projects designed to improve holistic health starting in 2008.

Physicians need to give a multidisciplinary approach to treating illness, explained Dr. Jorge Cortés, Medical Director of Clínica Bíblica and a member of the foundation's board of directors. "In the hospital we are trying to focus not just on the biological concept but on an integrated concept of health care. There are psychological, social, spiritual and material issues for human beings," he said.

Dr. Cortés said that doctors need to cover many topics in medical schools and there is only so much time, thus they often only focus on the physical, medical dynamics without considering the other disciplines.

He explained that many doctors within Clínica Bíblica come from Christian roots, and are more open to the spiritual, social and emotional aspects of healing. He praised those doctors who offer to pray with their patients, though he cautioned that all doctors need to be sensitive to the religious orientation of their charges and not force their view on them.

Cortés said that the hospital promotes the holistic concept in regular meetings with their physician's staff.

The founders of the foundation are descendents of Harry and Susan Strachan who established the Clínica Bíblica Hospital in San Jose. Also founders of the Latin America Mission, the Strachans established the Roblealto Child Care Association in San Jose and the Faro del Caribe radio station among other organizations in Costa Rica.

Dayton Roberts, who married into the Strachan family, participated in many activities during his missionary career here including founding the Editorial Caribe publishing house, serving as rector of the old Latin American Biblical Seminary and serving with Faro del Caribe. He has written several books flowing from his long-standing interest in environmental issues and the responsibility of churches to be involved with those problems.

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