

My Voluntary Experience

Ammar al-Naimi

Not too long ago, I was asked a question by my cousin. That question shocked me to the core and made me look deeply into my soul to find an answer. The question was "Why are you doing this work?"

You do not usually think about the reasons why you are doing voluntary work, until you are actually asked about them. If I was asked this question few months ago, I would have said that it is because I think of it as an obligation towards the society. As a debt that needs to be paid back to people. I believed in its importance for supporting the economy. It forms an integral part of a wide human-based service in our great nation. I knew that it was my duty to do voluntary work.

I would love to answer this question now, after I have been serving as a volunteer for six months. I now realize that I am not just doing this work to pay my share of debt to society. I am not doing it just to help the nation's economy. I am not doing it just to help other people. I realize that the person who is benefiting the most from this work is me.

My voluntary work at Saint Bartholomew's has shown me new aspects of life. It has shown me a side of me that I did not know existed. It has brought out the human being within. It revived the compassion and sympathy that was dying in my heart. It has quenched the thirst of my soul for being a part of something. It has made me feel worthy, needed and appreciated. And most importantly, it has given a meaning to my life.

I gained many valuable lessons from doing this work that made me feel the richest man on the face of this earth. Nothing can compare to the smile that shines on an aching person's face when he sees me. Nothing can compare to the excitement of a lonely person when he starts a conversation with me. Nothing can compare to the love

that I feel when I ask a mother about her son's health. Nothing can compare to the gratitude that I receive when I help a patient with all that I can. And certainly nothing can compare to the blessings that I get each time I enter a ward. These blessings that are granted by patients, nurses and doctors give me the will to go on and do my best work.

Doing voluntary work put my life on the right track. It taught me lessons that can never be taught. It enriched me and made me feel as a better person deep inside. It definitely created a new man that is so thankful for that he had the chance to serve as a volunteer.

I will always appreciate this opportunity. If I were to live my life all over again, I will always chose to do voluntary work.

Ammar al-Naimi, who wrote this article, is a young doctor who qualified in Baghdad in July 2006. He was taught in English, so when he speaks he doesn't have to translate, but thinks in English, and even dreams in English.

A number of you have met Ammar, when he accompanied us to church.

We met Ammar through Host, the organisation that introduces overseas students who like to visit a British family, to those families who enjoy meeting them. (See article in the June 2007 magazine for more information).

At present he is studying foetal medicine in London for his Master's degree, and he also does voluntary work as a 'trolley boy' in Bart's Hospital – hence this article which they asked him to write for them. He needs to stay in the UK after he completes his master's degree.

The occasional explosions that occur in the UK and make headlines are regular events in Baghdad, continual crumps and bangs throughout the night. There is virtual civil war where the Shiites set up road blocks and anyone with a Sunni name (like Amman) who is caught may be executed summarily.

It is one thing to read about this in an article or hear it on the radio or TV, quite another to hear it from someone having a meal with you. Everything is then very immediate.

John and Fiona Earle