

TO CURE OFTEN, BUT TO COMFORT ALWAYS: DAVID VERITY, MD MA (OXON) BM BCH FRCOPHTH, OSTJ

The son of a Royal Navy surgeon, David spent his earliest years in postings in Singapore, South Africa, Newfoundland, and the Kalahari, where his father also worked for the Church Missionary Society in the African homeland of Bophuthatswana, a remote territory. Exposure to diverse cultures, religions and languages, and the effects of apartheid were formative experiences in David's early life, and continue to influence his personal and professional outlook even now as the new Hospitalier of the Order of St John.

Before the family's return to England, David was sent to continue his education in the depths of Hampshire, where he completed his education at Winchester College before reading physiology and medicine at Oxford. Throughout this time, and for many years after, his grandfather, Anthony Harding Rains, was a profoundly influential figure in David's life: A distinguished surgeon in the British National Health Service, Professor Rains practiced medicine "to the highest standards, yet still had time for his family and grandchildren."

In 1985, Rains' good friend and colleague Sir Stephen Miller, then the Order of St John's Hospitalier, suggested that David, then a medical student, should visit Jerusalem. David was duly dispatched and returned twice before qualifying as a doctor. He witnessed the Hospital's extraordinary work in the face of great odds, and decided a few years later to pursue a career in ophthalmology. David carries with him today his vivid impression of "the commitment of the staff, the long-suffering of the patients, and the mission and ethos of an Order that gives people hope and value."

Soon after qualifying, and with only a modicum of experience, David took leave from Britain's National Health Service to work in Jerusalem. He was tasked by London to pursue a genetics project on the Silk Road disease, a blinding condition found between China and the Mediterranean basin, and particularly common in Palestine. Privately, he admits to "some of the most challenging and self-doubting moments of my entire career" during this time. With little clinical experience, he was launched into a research program in which DNA samples from Palestinians from across the disparate villages of the West Bank were obtained and transported back from Jordan and Israel to London. (He wore a flak jacket on more than one occasion.) But at times, David says, "Fortune favors the brave, and the published research from my thesis on *The Immunogenetic Basis of the Silk Road Disease* opened up career opportunities in London that ultimately led to my current post as at Moorfields Eye Hospital in London, where I now specialize in eyelid, lacrimal, orbit and socket disorders."

After leaving Jerusalem in 1995, David visited Dr. Ernesto Basauri in Spain, his previous diving buddy and a surgeon from Jerusalem. There he met his wife-to-be, Asunción, and now, 20 years later, they have two children, Gregoria (Goya, 18) and Harry (16). They spend their holidays in Spain, where David unwinds by tending to the family's olive and palm plantations. He also enjoys the challenge of languages, speaking Russian and Spanish, both of which he finds useful in an increasingly cosmopolitan world. To escape it all, David indulges in his life-long hobby — windsurfing across the wide and tranquil bays of Mallorca, "far from every possible distraction."

What began as David's personal interest in St John is now shared by the whole family. Goya and Harry have visited the hospital on many occasions, and spoken of their experiences at school and at the annual Hospital Symposia. Inspired by the St John staff, Asunción is writing a book on Palestinian cuisine. Young Harry likes to work in the kitchens, although his father notes he is possibly "less inclined to such duties at home." David is proud of his children's commitment, particularly their recent fund-raising efforts, which raised \$1,000 for the Hospital's pediatric ward.



The Verity family (l. to r.): Harry, David, Asunción, stepson Javier, and Goya.

In his role as Hospitalier, David seeks to strengthen relations between the Hospital Group and all its supporters. He is also a strong advocate for the medical and nursing staff, working to increase their opportunities for training and research both regionally and internationally. He firmly believes that these are essential if the Hospital's academic reputation is to grow.

While David's mission as Hospitalier is to do everything in his power to lift up disadvantaged patients and improve their vision, at heart he is a doctor with a very personal vision. He reflects: "As for all doctors, and especially as an ophthalmic surgeon, the greatest challenge is to listen to the patients, and to understand their concerns and how to treat them. Paraphrasing Hippocrates of Kos (c. 460-c. 370 BC), we are exhorted to 'cure often, but to comfort always.' Both are a privilege, as I discover each day. It is, of course, what we all do in the name of St John." ❄️

Karen Miller Lamb, DSTJ

In 2015 Dr. Verity founded a postgraduate group that has now grown to become the St John Ophthalmic Association (SOA) uniting clinicians and nurses across the Pories who are interested in the work of St John. In September 2018, the SOA will host its inaugural international meeting in Jerusalem. Over 125 leading surgeons will speak on state-of-the-art ophthalmology. Simultaneously, "Jerusalem — Fiat Lux", a separate congress there, will examine the history of medical work in the Holy Land, and the worldwide activity of St John. This conference is co-organized with the Rev'd Canon Nicholas Porter, KStJ, founder and Executive Director of Jerusalem Peacebuilders. For information on both events, please see www.SOA.global.