

Albania programme (Honorary Country Director: Dr John Bridson)

MCAI worked here from 1997 to 2009.



Picture of Berat a town in Albania

Twinning project

In 1997, a field office was established in Tirana, the capital city, and a twinning arrangement was established between the Children's Hospital in Tirana and the Children's Service in Barnsley Hospital in the UK. Medical aid and supplies were provided for a number of the children's hospitals in Albania.



From the left the local Albanian team: Evis, Maksim and Monda Bozo.

Fellowships project

Fellowships for senior Albanian children's doctors were created so that they could visit the UK to receive medical education and training in Barnsley and Sheffield hospitals in the following specialities; intensive care, oncology, liver disease, gastroenterology, and paediatric nephrology.



The children's hospital in Tirana

International Paediatric Conference

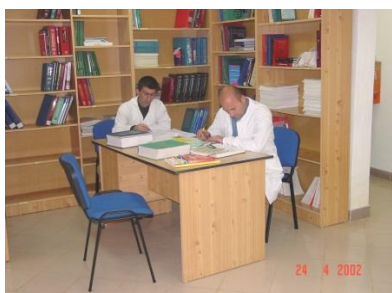
MCAI helped organise the first International Paediatric Conference in Albania, held, in Tirana in October 1999 with international expert speakers and 150 delegates from Albania and Kosovo. Subsequently, the conference occurred annually thereafter.



Annual Conference with delegates and John Bridson (centre)

Education centre

An education centre for the doctors and nurses at Mother Theresa Children's Hospital in Tirana was set up over a number of years. It comprises a lecture theatre and a library which contains medical books, publications and journals, with computers linked to the Internet.



The education centre



The lecture theatre

APLS translation and teaching

The manual for the Advanced Paediatric Life Support (APLS) course was translated into the Albanian language by Dr Sasha Dega, who also received a fellowship to receive medical training in the UK. The manual was distributed to many paediatricians throughout Albania..

Health education and empowerment programme

The Parent held child record and advice booklet, part of the health education and empowerment programme as used in Bosnia, was translated into Albanian. The booklets are used for record-keeping and offer important advice and information on various subjects e.g. breast-feeding, immunisations and hygiene. The Ministry of Health endorsed a trial to distribute them to mothers and adolescents through a limited number of schools and clinics in Tirana.

Neonatal resuscitation training programme

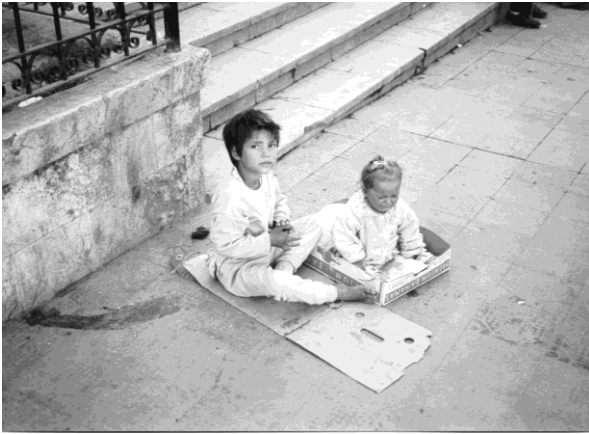
A neonatal resuscitation training programme, organised by specialists from Boston, was established over a three year period. Initially, this was started in Tirana and then included three other cities in Albania.



The neonatal and maternity units

Speech and language project

Experts from the UK visited Albania to help establish a system to help children with speech and language problems and also to support the work of MCAI with the many orphans and street children.



Street children and orphans

Advocacy in Action

A survey conducted by MCAI in 2003 found that more than 90% of 8-12 year old children living in the southern hills of Albania had severe iodine deficiency. Iodine deficiency can lead to a variety of problems including stillbirth, congenital abnormalities in new born babies and learning difficulties in children. The results were published (see the publications section of this website) and presented to the Albanian Government. A further study took place that showed that supplementation of iodine to 10 -12 year old children improved their cognitive performance. MCAI presented the results of the Iodine Deficiency Disorder project at the annual Albanian Paediatric Association conference, where the information was well received. The Deputy Minister for Health was present and agreed to act on MCAI's findings to provide iodination of salt throughout Albania.

MCAI also observed in 2006 that many shops in Albania stocked what was labelled as "Iodized Salt", purchased many different brands and had them analysed: none contained iodine. This finding was reported to the Ministry of Health and published in the press.

By 2007 MCAI had found that the sale of Iodized Salt in the shops was much more reliable. A second analysis of samples collected from shops labelled as iodized salt, found that most of them contained iodine.

The iodine work was completed by 2008, and a new national law was enacted making universal salt iodization in Albania mandatory. MCAI played an important role in achieving this outcome which still has a positive effect on the whole of the population of Albania today.

News from MCAI Newsletter 2003

At least 20,000 pregnancies a year in Albania are at risk from iodine deficiency.

This means that the babies will likely end up dead or with an IQ loss of 20 points. This can be prevented by giving the Mum two iodine capsules **costing just 31p**.

Plans to provide children with iodine by adding it to salt continue following the survey in April which produced clear evidence that this is a serious problem and the resultant incidence of mental disability will continue to rise in Albania if nothing is done.

We have proved that severe iodine deficiency exists in more than 90% of 8-12 year old school children living in the hills of southern Albania. Following MCAI's survey in April, the results were delivered to the Albanian Government and now there is a national programme of salt iodisation but this will only become effective over a number of years.

Meanwhile vast numbers of children and women of childbearing age are affected, this leads to a drop of 20 points in the population IQ, and to fetal and neonatal loss. We wish to study the problem further in 10 to 12 year old children and then embark on an urgent iodine replacement programme using iodised oil capsules.



Dr Janet Hislop and Anne Corbett, a speech and language therapist, visited Albania recently as part of a series of visits investigating the provision in Albania. Said Dr Hislop:

"We identified 2 children that seemed to be profoundly deaf, and more importantly we identified the need for training in methods of hearing testing in young children. The more difficult problem for Albania will be the provision of hearing aids to identified children, because of the cost as well as the expertise needed.

We also met one child who had athetoid cerebral palsy and was deaf because of kernicterus, which we were assured could be prevented in Albania if the birth attendants were aware of the need."

News from MCAI Newsletter 2004

"We expected warmth, but our visit coincided with the coldest wettest May on record. Some of the main roads have better surfaces now which led to faster and more dangerous driving. Myrteza our driver kept us safe (just). In the rural areas the severe poverty does not change."
(Dr John Bridson on his return from a recent visit to Albania).

Albania is an iodine deficient country which leads to a variety of problems including a general significant lowering of ability of a population in the worst hit areas.

MCAI's intention is to find out whether a dose of iodine given to iodine deficient children improves their performance. Also to train testers for our next study and to evaluate the tests we wanted to use.

When the study is complete it is MCAI's intention to try to help and encourage the local professionals in their attempts to eradicate the problem.

✚ Read 'Severe Iodine Deficiency in Southern Albania'
Zimmermann M B, Bridson J, Bozo M, Grimici L, Selimaj V, Tanner M S.
Int. J. Vitam. Nutr. Res. 73 (5), July 2003 ©
Hogrefe & Huber Publishers

