



Acupuncture notes from Hebron

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Two days before we leave for our World Medicine charity acupuncture trip to Hebron, Peter does his back in and I realise that I am going by myself. Forty-eight hours later and I am sitting on the plane scared and excited.

I am greeted in Hebron by four men who carry my bags, sort my room out, find me a heater (it's absolutely freezing and I cannot believe I didn't check the weather as I have almost no warm clothes), and warn me not to go out in the cold when I have wet hair!

The clinic is quite rough, it's usually used as a children's centre for kids to come and learn and play; there don't appear to be any playgrounds, kids don't seem to have toys, so this place is a refuge for very under privileged children. I have two rooms and a reception. People come in with all types of problems,

but I see mostly musculoskeletal conditions; knee pain, back pain, etc.

The women all wear headscarves and only show their faces, some are in burqas. I would say about 90 per cent are overweight, most morbidly obese. It is a hard life, especially for the women who have to serve their

husbands, which they accept seemingly willingly; but as a very free western woman, I have my doubts! In general, they do not exercise, difficult to do in a burqa and in this environment. They cook, clean, and look after their five, six, seven or eight children. Some of them work, although it appears not in high-flying jobs.

This place is like a mini jail. They are fenced in with huge concrete walls and perceive Israel on the other side as a shiny new developed country where

people have good job prospects and the women are free. The men tell me that it is hard to find a good job; some of them are lucky enough to be able to work in their fathers' businesses, but for others it can take months to find a suitable job and many are out of work.

The situation here is confusing. They tell me that Israel controls some parts of the city, where they have checkpoints that people have to pass through on their way to do shopping or go to the mosque. Other parts are controlled by the Palestinians, but if the Israeli army decide they want to

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come in and look for someone, the Palestinian police have to leave the streets and turn their power over to the army.

Hebron itself is a concrete jungle, rubbish everywhere and poverty very apparent. I don't realise how suppressed I feel until I come to Israel on my last day; a place where I can laugh, joke, wear short sleeves, be proud to be a woman, be proud to show off my figure and stand my ground and not just talk about whether or not I am going to get

married and have babies. I realise how lucky I am to have been born in the western world where we have freedom, rights and hope.

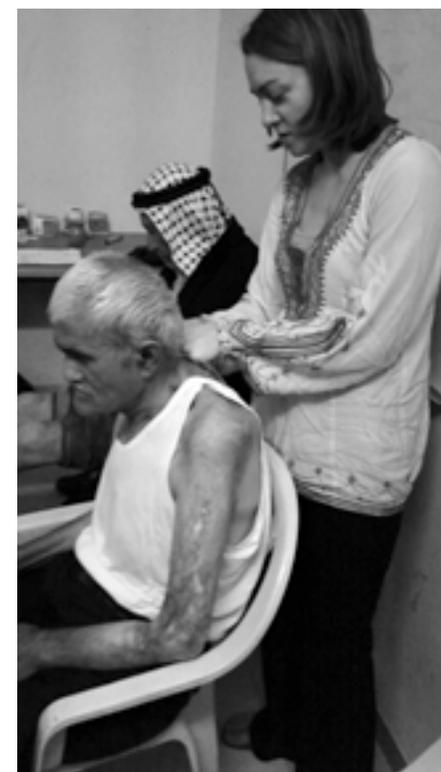
My days in clinic are long and hard, I treat anywhere from 30 to 50 people a day. In the beginning I worry that with me basically just throwing needles in as fast as I can people won't get better very quickly. I am amazed at the results we see; apart from very chronic, complicated conditions, such as people who have had strokes or are in wheelchairs, almost everyone gets 75 to 100 per cent better. I treat quite a few children who respond incredibly well to the acupuncture, and none of them cries!

The people here are amazing, and we have such a laugh with my attempts



at Arabic. Everyone is so ready to talk, joke and laugh. It is a true community, everyone seems to know each other or be related and they all help each other out. I never feel alone.

The people I work with do a fantastic job of keeping me amused. They teach me funny words in Arabic and play stupid pranks like giving me chicken for lunch one day; 'this is a healthy chicken ...', it has toothpicks stuck all over it, '... it's had acupuncture!' I don't think I could cope



with the huge numbers of people I have to treat without their help, support and silliness. They keep me laughing and without them I couldn't have done it.

Every night I go for dinner at someone's house. The invitations are endless, everyone wants to feed me and give me presents. I don't lift a finger. I always have my entourage of three or four men who run around after me, buying me water and food, carrying my bags, and just making sure that I have everything I could possibly want. In a country where women are suppressed, they also seem to be treated like princesses. And to be honest I quite like it, although I wouldn't trade it for a second for my freedom and my right to do what I want to do with my life.

Lucy's charity trip was organised through World Medicine. For more information go to www.worldmedicine.org.uk