

**UROLINK REPORT**  
**IRAQI KURDISTAN 2012**  
**Christine Evans**

I left on **4th September** from Manchester Airport on Turkish Airlines. Easy journey via Istanbul where I was meeting Aza Mohammed, a urological trainee from Kettering [East Midlands Deanery]. We arrived in Erbil at 2.45am to be met by no-one in the actual airport. This is a brand spanking new airport built in the last 4 years not the small building which was there then, this new one is the size of John Lennon airport in Liverpool. Cars are not allowed near the entrance, for security reasons, except for the posh people of which I am not one. We found our transport in the outside car park after a phone call to our host Shakir Balindi in Duhok 150 kms away. Aza who is Kurdish by birth but British also, by inclination, was of great value, as a suitcase carrier and a speaker of the language.

We drove for 3 hours to Duhok watching the sun rise in the east, very dry country at the moment all brown, rains come in late autumn. The roads have improved even in the last 4 years and much of the network is or is becoming dual carriage way. I drank duty free whisky and smoked in the car and watched the speeding traffic and listened to Aza prattling away in Kurdish, he was back here earlier this year but before that not for 4 years. We arrived in Duhok at 6 am at the Dilshan Palace hotel, extremely \*\*\*\*, we were given our key cards go to our rooms and I open my door to find a man in the bed and I then had a fit of giggles in the corridor with Aza, the next key was for an empty room and off to sleep after 22 hours awake.

We woke up lunchtime and I did nothing all day which is what I needed, whilst the youngsters worked but we all went out to dinner starting at 10pm I couldn't get to sleep for a full stomach. Aza has mother, 2 unmarried sisters and a brother with a family in Duhok they are all living together in one big house, he went to visit them during the day.

**Thursday 6th** went to the Renal Unit where there is a flourishing transplant service, they do about 6 per week, all live donors but not all related. Some kidneys are given altruistically all though no payment as such is given there are gifts exchanged. We then visited the Dean of the medical school, an ophthalmologist, we discussed the problems of equipment, lack of privacy for the patients on the wards and in clinics, but also how much the medical school had improved especially the numbers of trained staff, the fact that many of the techniques are nearly up to date.

I am really enjoying the Dilshan Palace hotel, good internet service, food fine and a pool by which to drink German draught lager, drinking elsewhere ie the lounge is not acceptable.

It has been lovely to see Mohammed Saido , the registrar who looked after me all those 10 years ago, when I first came to Kurdistan and at every visit since, he has now become a consultant in the Accident Hospital in Duhok. On Friday 7<sup>th</sup>, their day off we went to see his friend and colleague Dr Azeez to Zakho, a large town on the border with Turkey, for lunch. One of the daughters is going to London shortly for a school visit, she spoke excellent English.

The 3 of us then went about 100 km into the northern mountains to see the beauty spots Brilliant scenery, not much greenery, amazingly the whole area had mobile reception although very mountainous and remote. Better reception compared with parts of North Wales so they are really advanced with their mobile technology, all with iPhones.

During the next 2 days whilst Aza was operating with both Shakir and Mohammed I taught the final year medical students in urology and clinical anatomy, they are due to take their final exams early next summer. I also saw 2 patients for Shakir although I told him I had retired! One was lady with 4 years

intermittent heavy bleeding, post renal surgery, probably a post op traumatic vascular malformation as yet undiagnosed. We are awaiting a selective renal arteriogram. There are no interventional radiologists in the whole country [of Iraq] who can do selective embolization, these angiograms are done by the cardiologists.

Also I saw a youngish man, police man, with erectile problems may be hormone related, but I suspect psychological as he is married to a surgeon!!! we await further pituitary hormonal function tests which are available here.

I had a lovely meal with Aza and family, his younger sister Serwa is on Facebook for the Syrian refugees who are in a camp nearby. She provided some wedding clothes for a couple due to marry in Syria but they had to escape to the camp before the marriage, now performed in the camp, I hope to visit this before I go.

**On Monday the 11<sup>th</sup>** went to the theatre recovery, only place where one can talk privately in this hospital, Azadi, which means freedom, Teaching hospital, to see a man for Mohammed with Peronies' disease and diabetes which despite treatment was getting worse. Options for treatment were given, all a little bit hopeless apart from a penile prosthesis. Apparently Shakir has done one 3 years ago, which is working still. I did one 4 years ago. This man incidentally lost his prostheses from erosion after 2 years but developed lung cancer anyhow shortly after, he may not now be alive.

I also saw the theatre sister Soad again who worked so well with Srimi and Sister Jo when they were over to do the laparoscopic training course 4 years ago. She is well in charge of all 6 main theatres plus 2 transplant theatres in the separate renal unit, which are spanking brand new. I went there on Tuesday to watch a live unrelated transplant which went very well Aza doing the neo ureterocystostomy.

On the **Wednesday 12th** I went to help with the selective renal arteriogram and I think, not 100% sure, we have seen the renal arterio-venous malformation but hope to be there when they explore the kidney next Monday. I also did a teaching ward round with Shakir. Aza left this evening back to UK.

In the evening I went with one of the urology registrars, Hakar, to PDK political rally for the 50<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the supposed freedom of Kurdistan which has not yet occurred.



*Human PDK flag in Duhok stadium*

The football stadium was packed, 25,000 people, lots of pushing and shoving as no tickets but I got into the VIP area and sat next to one of the Mayors of Duhok. The Prime Minister was there, Barzani, the younger, and he spoke with much fervour, I did not understand a word but it sounded good, about Kurdish freedom. Some chance with the Turks and the Americans. Then there were lots of fireworks etc Good evening, I felt honoured to be there.

The next day (**13<sup>th</sup>**) I went with Mohammed and Serwa, Aza's sister, to the Syrian refugee camp, Domis, about 10 miles away

towards Mosul, in the more dangerous area which is a sort of no-mans land between trouble and safety. No trouble at all and we were well received by the man who in charge of building the huts and laying the pipe and electricity lines.

There 19,000 people there so far of which 9,000 are single mostly young men not willing to fight for Assad or the PKK who are supporting him. The PKK are Kurds but they are the 'freedom' fighters. There are also 2,500 families. The Syrians are coming across at a rate of 1,000 per day. We met the MSF team the female doctor Anya, from Germany, was pleased



*The doctor Anya from MSF and the builder from Quantel*

to see us, especially the pain killers I brought and Mohammed and I saw a few patients. We then wandered around the camp, they have sturdy tents from UNHCR and huts are being put up rapidly, Each tent /dwelling has a water butt, electricity, some with TV satellite dishes and also a few shops and even a barber BUT no schools. They need psychologists, especially with the young single men, to help with the distress, and midwives. We sat and talked politics for about an hour outside the shop, drinking coffee and smoking.. I am very pleased I went.



*The tents and huts with the water butts and electricity lines in the refugee camp*

On **Friday 14<sup>th</sup>** day of rest after all had gone to the mosque we had an afternoon/evening swimming party and barbeque, in Mohammed's sister house. The kids swam during the day and then the men in the dusk when the women had gone in to prepare the food. No mixed adult bathing here except for me!! I declined as the water was far too cold, just out on the mains. Still the chaps had a good time cavorting, I was interested to see how many could not swim



Mohammed by the pool

We then had a delicious BBQ cooked by the chaps of course.

On **Saturday 15<sup>th</sup>** I saw another renal transplant, taught the trainees and then I went to see the Director General, Dr Nazir who is a young psychiatrist, he looks after all the medical staff,

building etc of the Duhok directorate which is vast in area about the size of North Wales and about 2 million population.

I complimented him on the great improvements there were in transplantation, cardiology, made a plea for more interventional radiology including TRUS guided biopsies by the urologists and more teaching for the trainees and junior consultants, especially abroad. In the evening we all went for dinner at 9pm at the Juan hotel, where I have stayed in previous years and had a great laugh, telling jokes in English, also drank some wine!!

The next 2 days much of the same with wards round and teaching. The amount of stone disease is phenomenal and is the greatest work load. See Xray below.

On the Monday took the bleeding lady to theatre. Not sure if we found the bleeding point but saw blood issuing into the middle calyx which was under run and oversewn. We left a malecot catheter in the pelvis we will see if she continues to bleed, if so out with the kidney.

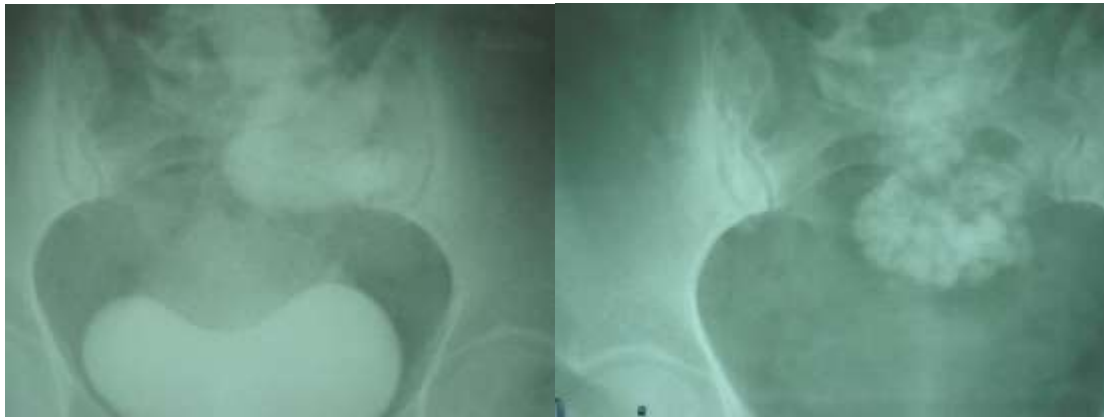


*From the left  
The DG Dr Nazar, Dr Bakhtia sub DG, Dr Shakir, Dr Abdulla Saeed transplant surgeon, dinner at Juan Hotel*

The rest of the day was saying farewell to all my friends then a long journey home, starting 11pm via Istanbul. I found the smoking area in the airport a caged pen absolutely crammed full



of desperate smokers!!! Otherwise it was an easy flight home arrived at 5pm on 19<sup>th</sup>. A wonderful trip.



*Pelvic kidney filled with stones*

**My thanks** to Urolink [BAUS] for the flight ticket, £797.00  
To all the wonderful staff at Azadi Teaching hospital in Duhok especially Dr Shakir Balindi, who invited me, provided brilliant accommodation, kept me busy and well entertained.

Also thanks Mohammed Seido, for his kindness and entertaining me plus all the registrars/students who drove me about as well. I have said I will be very happy to keep in touch with them and teach again if they wish.

It was lovely to have Aza with me for the first week, I am hoping he will now take over the mantle of keeping in touch with this area.

They do need teaching opportunities, training courses and to develop a Kurdistan Urological Association, to keep in touch with the urologists in Erbil and Sulaimania and the smaller towns, which they do not do at present.

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