



ing for it — all of it. [Instead], we had women paying for a health service that should have been covered by their taxes.”

Provinces that did not comply with Ottawa’s request by October 1995 were penalized because the federal government began clawing back their transfer payments. “The Newfoundland government was losing anywhere from \$8000 to \$11 000 a month,” says Gerry White, assistant deputy minister of health (policy and planning). “Women were paying for the service at the clinic and that

amount was being deducted on the other end by Ottawa.”

After 2 years of reduced payments, Newfoundland decided to stop fighting the decision. In January the province announced it would cover the full cost of abortion services provided at the clinic. “The province is now in full compliance with the Canada Health Act,” says White. “Abortion is considered an insured service, so women who go to the clinic can now use their MCP [health insurance] card.

For its part, the Morgentaler Clinic has eliminated its fees. “This is

a province where people don’t have a lot of money,” explains Keats. “We’ve had women coming in here with income tax cheques, with their student loans, with whatever money they could come up with. That should never have happened.”

So far, the only opposition to the decision has come from the Care Centre for Women, which is run by the local right-to-life association. The group has been writing letters to the local papers, condemning the government’s change in policy. — © *Beth Ryan*

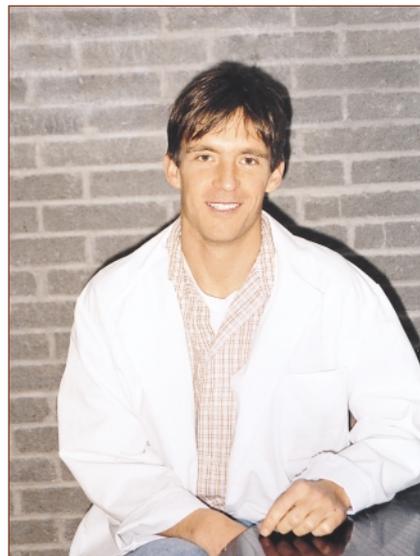
A bittersweet summer in Zaire

The summer of 1997 provided a profoundly bittersweet experience for Simon Pulfrey, a second-year medical student at the University of British Columbia. He joined Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF) for 3 months as a nutritionist at the height of the civil war in the former Zaire, now known once again as the Congo. When MSF hires physicians they must have at least 2 years’ experience and most will have worked with other aid organizations, explains Nadine Ijaz, coordinator of MSF’s western regional office. In Pulfrey’s case, his master’s degree in nutrition, ability to speak French and work experience in Tibet and Nepal qualified him for the project in Zaire. “I have always wanted to work in situations with an elemental need and where I will be challenged,” explains Pulfrey. “I enjoy being tested. I enjoy being humbled.”

Pulfrey got all that and more after he arrived in Goma, Zaire, on the same day rebel forces took over the capital, Kinshasa. “It was just mayhem,” he remembers. He spent the first few nights in a villa patrolled by 4 guards and scanned by

searchlights, and was then evacuated to Canada. He returned 10 days later, when conditions had stabilized.

Pulfrey’s job was to get food to villagers who had been displaced by the fighting and were now living in the jungle. Being part of a large or-



Pulfrey: horrific and inspiring

ganization gave him “free rein and a lot of responsibility,” he says. He arranged for vehicles and radios, hired cooks and set up fencing for the feeding stations. He also

recorded the incidence of malnutrition and death and reported the data to UNICEF, which then shipped food supplies from Europe. Many of the villagers he saw were young children; the diseases they faced included measles, malaria, meningitis, tuberculosis and HIV, as well as malnutrition. Although some children improved dramatically over a few days, Pulfrey says he also had to “turn his back on a lot of desperate situations. It was horrific at times and inspiring at other times.”

Every day the MSF team encountered different ethnic groups and “you were never sure who was on who’s side.” There was also the incongruity of brutal warfare taking place in a picturesque setting. In one case Pulfrey went by a burnt-out bus with “corpses that you walked over, and in the heart of all this chaos was a beautiful place.” He remembers elephants walking in the background, against brilliant blue skies, as he surveyed the bus.

Pulfrey found it difficult to leave the “very inspiring people” with whom he lived and worked in Zaire. “I walked away with so much insight.” — © *Heather Kent*