

Member Care

Detlef Bloecher

What makes missionaries strong, healthy and flexible to stay fresh and grow in their personality, spiritually vibrant and resilient to overcome crises and challenges? It is usually believed that Member Care has a major bearing on missionary health and longevity, but only ReMAP I and ReMAP II have provided us with the empirical evidence. When we talk about Member Care (MC), we have a full range of services in mind: pastoral care, personal encouragement, team building, spiritual refreshment, professional counselling in critical incidents etc.

Kelly O'Donnell¹ has illustrated this with a Roman Fountain that has several levels of water basins and the water running from one level to the next. 1. In the centre (and at the top level) there is the Master Care: the Lord himself taking care of his children. 2. Self-Care as Apostle Paul expressed it: "Take care of yourself and the flock" (1Ti 4:16). Each missionary is responsible for his/her own lifestyle and spiritual health. 3. Mutual Care, one person taking care of his/her colleague (Jo 13:14+34; Ro 15:5; Gal 6:2; 1Pet 4:10). This includes the care of expatriates and Nationals. 4. Sender Care provided by sending churches and mission organisations. 5. Specialist Care like Medical Pastoral, Training, Family Care, Counselling, Financial Professionals. And finally 6. Network Care which describes the cooperation of Care Centres: Connecting, Consulting, Catalysing.

The ReMAP I study showed (fig. 1) that mission agencies with little investment in MC suffer a very high attrition proving the significance of MC and the attrition rate comes down with increasing care for their missionaries. Thus, MC really pays out. Yet there are also indications that agencies with a very intensive personal care may have an increased return rate. Can there be a too much of MC when something good can possibly weaken the missionaries' resilience, foster a self-centredness and feeling of entitlement?

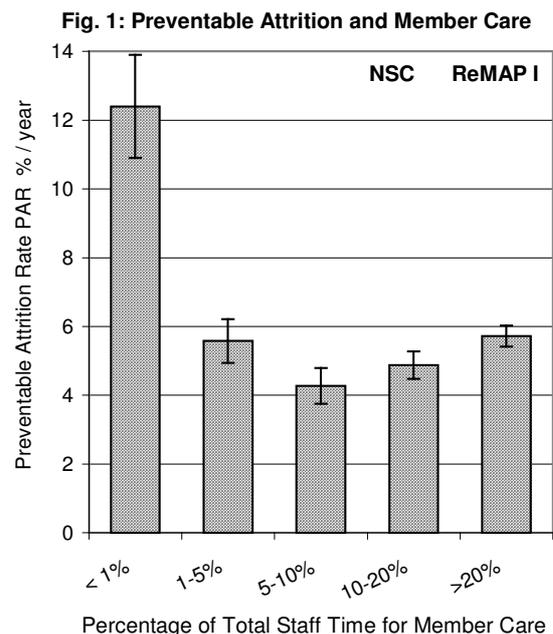
Member Care in OSC and NSC

To answer this question MC was studied in more detail in ReMAP II. It was found that that OSC agencies invest $7.9 \pm 0.4 \%$ of their total staff time (in the home office and on the field) in MC, that is: one of 12 missionaries is serving full time their colleagues (or correspondingly more serving part time). NSC-agencies dedicate the double amount of staff time to MC ($14.4 \pm 0.9 \%$), so that one in seven NSC missionaries is caring for his/her colleagues. This confirms the earlier findings of ReMAP I, and recognises the relational structure of societies in the majority world.

ReMAP II also showed that agencies allocate $4.3 \pm 0.2 \%$ (OSC), $9.8 \pm 0.8 \%$ (NSC) of their total budget to MC. This percentage is somewhat lower than the percentage of their total staff time, as the budget normally includes project costs etc. besides personnel costs – and possibly not all salaries are included in this sum.

The majority of the MC resources are dedicated to curative crisis intervention (OSC: $69 \pm 2 \%$; NSC: $79 \pm 2 \%$), whereas only 1/5 (NSC) to 1/3 (OSC) are allocated to prevention, i.e. strengthening of the missionary's personality and spiritual life. This fact indicates that MC is still considered primarily a reactive emergency service for wounded missionaries, while prevention is still underdeveloped.

NSC-agencies with high retention assign twice as much of their finances to MC than low retaining agencies and also a double fraction in Preventative MC ($23 \pm 5 \%$ vs. $11 \pm 6 \%$) so that they invest four times more finances to prevention ($8.7 \% * 0.23 = 2.3 \%$ vs. $4.3 \% * 0.11 = 0.5 \%$) than low retaining agencies. This huge difference indicates the vast gulf in their ethos and practices.



¹ Kelly O'Donnell (2002). Going Global: A Member Care Model for Best Practice. In: Kelly O'Donnell (Ed.), Doing Member Care well. (pp. 13-22). Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.

Member Care and missionary retention

The central concept of the ReMAP II study is “retention”: that is how many out of 100 missionaries are still in service at the end of a year. Ideally this is 100 % but in practice this is somewhat lower. Figure 2 gives the retention rate of OSC-agencies (when considering potentially preventable reasons for attrition only) RRP in dependence of the amount of MC. The results prove that agencies with little MC lose almost twice as many workers for potentially preventable reasons than those with reasonable MC (3 % vs. 1.6%).

A difference of 1.4 % per year appear small, but there is much more at stake. Missionary retention is merely an indicator. It is like the tip of an iceberg with 6/7 of the bulk hidden under the waterline. There are many more workers ineffective, worn down by the continued stress of cross-cultural mission – yet may not have the courage to return home. Missionary retention, on the other hand, reflects the missionaries sense of vibrant spirituality, inner peace, personal fulfilment, job satisfaction and spiritual fruitfulness. It draws our attention to specific issues like continuous personal growth, team building, effective leadership and organisational development.

Too much of Member Care ?

Can there be a „too much“ in MC when something good turns into something negative? Could it develop into a “cushioning” effect that erodes missionaries resilience and personal growth? Indeed, there is anecdotal evidence that often the attrition rate rises after a field visit of a professional counsellor. Indeed, we need to acknowledge that some missionaries are assigned to the wrong task, others may lack the required gifting, skills, training or experience. These missionaries need to be reassigned; false placements be corrected, wounded missionaries need restoration or be brought home safely and with dignity. Yet visiting counsellors can also jump to hasty conclusions without consideration of all the options of personal growth, inner healing or reassignment within the country of service – and I praise God for the growing number of Member Care Centres for Missionaries in various countries². Western agencies have a tendency to send home missionaries as soon as problems occur. By this practice they deprive local believers of the witnessing and experience of effective conflict resolution and restoration.

Member Care at the expense of organisational structure

The ReMAP II data show that mission agencies with very intensive MC programs gave a significantly lower rating in organisational issues like: Mission statement, Clear goals, missionaries’ pre-field training, especially in Missiology, Effective orientation of new missionaries in the place of service, language study, supervision, effective administrative support, sustained and adequate financial support and maintenance of spiritual life. Apparently those agencies have put a strong emphasis on their member care program at the neglect of other organisational issues. Yet a good MC program will not keep missionaries in service if it is not supplemented by careful candidate selection, good prefield training and effective leadership. Therefore it is believed that it is not the MC in itself that initiates the increased attrition rate but the neglect of organisational

Fig. 2: Retention and Member Care in OSC

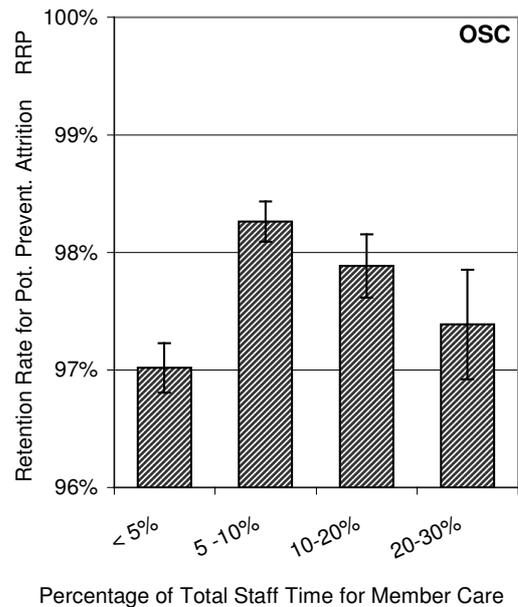
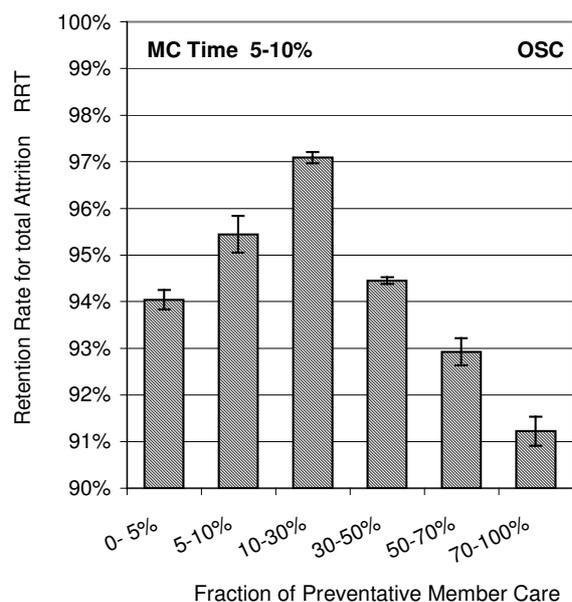


Fig. 3: Retention Total and Prevent. Member Care



² A comprehensive list is given in Kelly O'Donnell (Ed.). Doing Member Care well (pp. 529-550). Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2002.

issues. In addition it might be speculated that fragile candidates might choose those agencies with an extensive MC program and their recruitment office may let some of those persons slip through trusting on their MC program – which in the end will not pay off. In addition we need to consider that ReMAP II merely monitored the quantity but not the quality of the MC program.

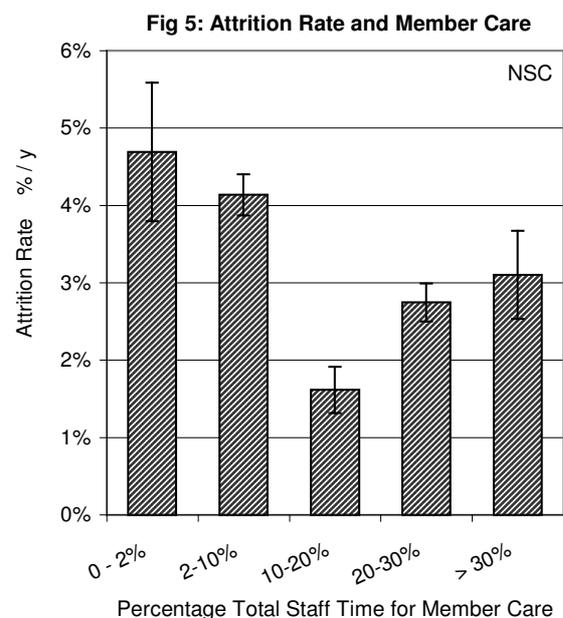
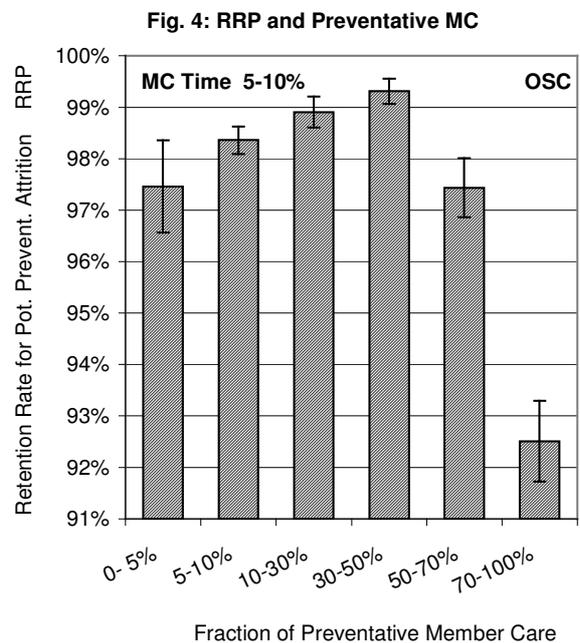
Preventative Member Care

The effect of MC was further explored by analysing the subgroup of OSC agencies with MC Time 5-10% (maximal RRP) for the fraction of preventative MC – that is strengthening of the missionaries’ personality and spiritual life (in contrast to reactive crisis response and restoration of wounded missionaries). RRP shows an inverted u-type curve that falls towards both ends (fig. 3). Agencies that invest in preventative MC or in reactive crisis intervention to the neglect of the other service experience a reduced retention rate. Apparently both types of ministries are needed: preventative MC (i.e. personal growth, spiritual life, healthy relationships, team building etc.) as well as effective help in crises and the restoration of wounded workers. Fig. 3 also shows that the optimum appears to be at one quarter for preventative MC (when considering total attrition).

However, when we consider Preventable Attrition only (RRP, fig. 4), we find a u-type with its maximum is shifted to 40 % preventative MC. Apparently preventable attrition is reduced particularly by preventative MC.

Apparently potentially preventable as well as unpreventable attrition are affected by preventative MC. At first the latter seems irrational as „unpreventable attrition“ sounds invariant - however we need to keep in mind that it was defined in ReMAP II as retirement, death in service, illness, loss of visa, completion of contract, end of project, appointment into leadership position in the mission etc.. And these factors are not invariant per se but may be affected by preventative MC: when a missionary stays physically, emotionally and spiritually healthy, his/her immune system will also be strengthened, he/she is making wise decisions, there will be a caring ministry team and a stimulating environment in which the whole person can grow. It builds a hardy personality, and when the project is completed or an pre-set assignment comes to its end (unpreventable attrition) the missionary might be open for a new task and challenges. He/she may even continue with ministry after reaching the retirement age.

For NSC agencies we find a similar result³ and Fig. 5 gives the curve for total attrition of the years 2001/02⁴. As indicated before, NSC agencies have their optimum at 10-20 % total staff time invested in MC. The analysis for preventative MC (fig. 6) again shows an inverted u-curve with a maximum at 25 % preventative MC. When considering preventable attrition only (fig 7), the optimum is found at roughly equal proportions of prevention and restoration.



³ Yet with lower magnitude as RRT and RRP are generally higher than in OSC so that effects become smaller . In addition, the recent trend towards organisational development in NSC and general reduction in attrition are partially levelled in in the long-term analysis covering 20 years.

⁴ Covering only the time span 2001/02

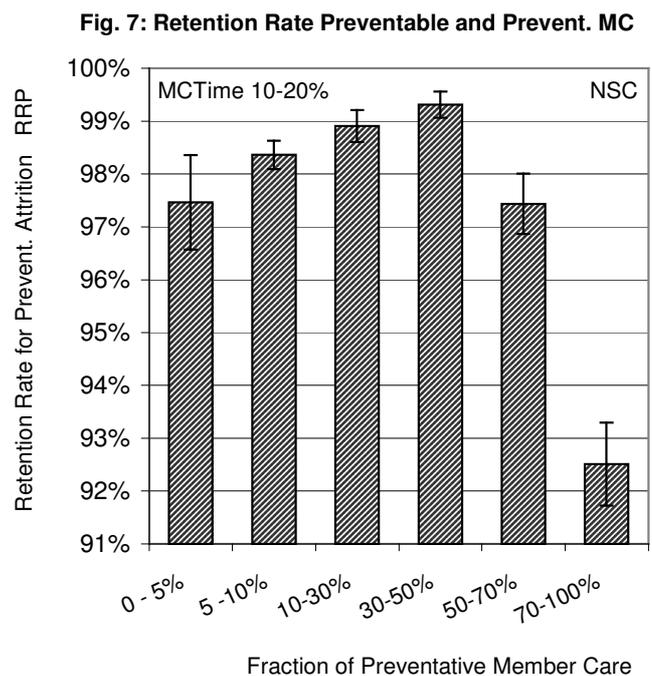
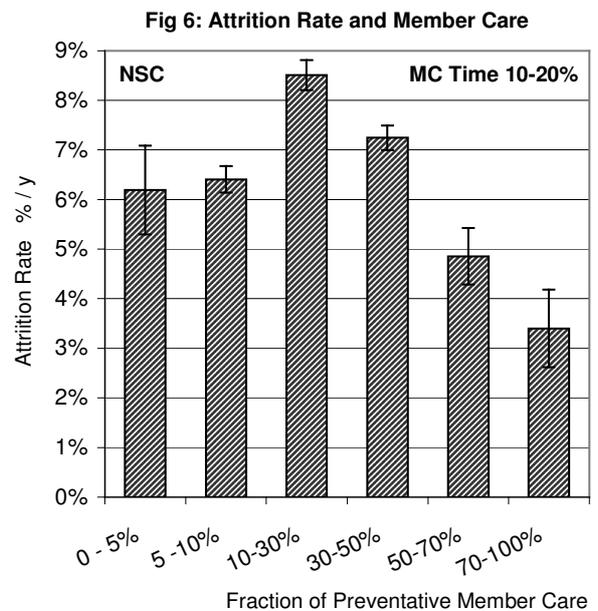
A comparison of the numeric numbers with ReMAP I, however, show that the attrition rate in OSC and NSC are now significantly lower than 10 years ago. This happened against the global trend to shorter assignments and indeed a new generation of missionaries is now in service with different needs and gifting. Yet the last 10 years have also given witness to a tremendous organisational development of many mission agencies, especially in NSC⁵, and particularly regarding the quantity and quality of MC. In addition, an international network of MC specialists has developed, so that a huge wealth of MC resources are available today, including online-resources (e.g. www.membercare.org, www.missionarycare.org, www.missionarycare.com) as well as a global network of MC facilities.

MC helps missionaries to grow spiritually, expand their resilience and durability, maintain their physical and emotional health, build effective ministry teams, encourage and care for each other, communicate effectively, develop a consultative leadership style, grow in flexibility to adjust to ever changing needs and challenges.

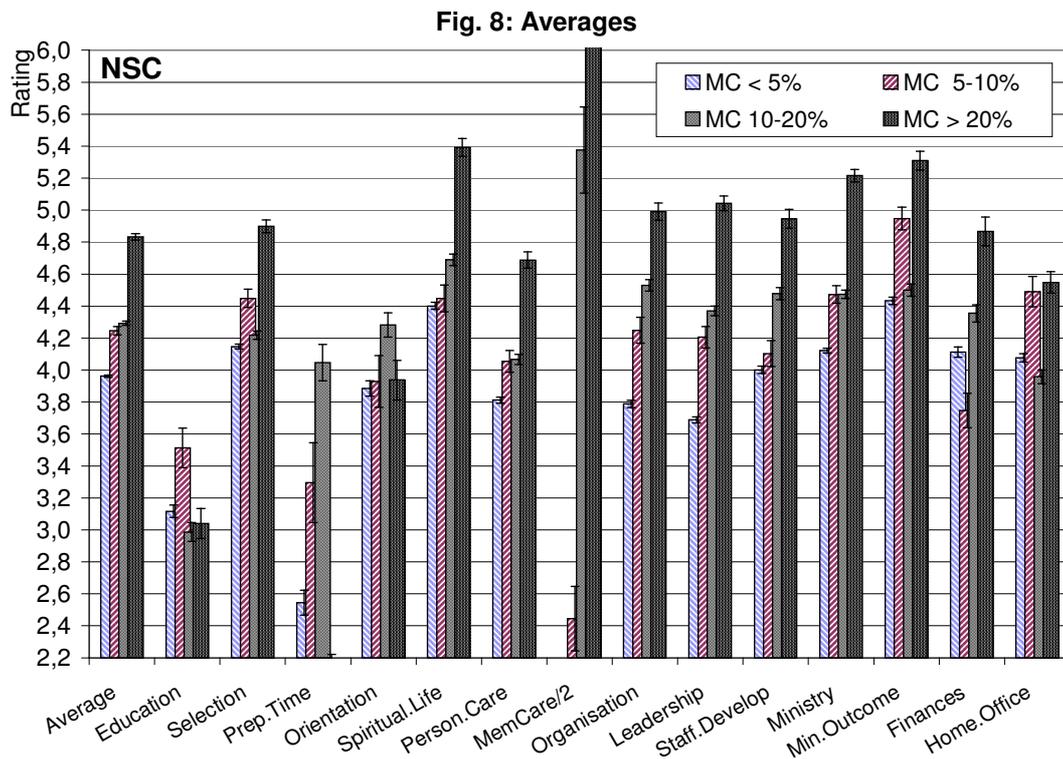
This general trend is reflected in the agencies' organisational culture as shown in ReMAP II. Leaders of NSC agencies with high involvement in MC (> 20 % Time in MC) have given a much higher rating of almost all organisational parameters (fig. 8). In particular they gave 15 – 30 % higher rating of the issues: Missionary teams provide mutual support; Effective pastoral care on the field level; Resolution of interpersonal conflicts; Sustained and adequate financial support; Annual vacation; Contingency plans; Adequate medical care and MK-schooling options. Leaders of OSC agencies with high MC gave increased rating in: Supervision on the field; Handling complaints from missionaries; language and cultural studies; Sustained and adequate financial support; Maintenance of missionaries' spiritual life; Involvement of home church in the missionary's life and ministry – and it is believed that all these factors help to reduce the early return of missionaries.

Excellent personal care has great significance in our rapidly changing modern world. Many ministry locations are today shaken by natural disasters, ethnic conflicts, violence, corruption, social injustice and extreme poverty which put missionaries under constant stress. MC is not an option but an obligation. It is an integrated way of caring for our missionaries that infuses all principles and practices – not an additional component in our agency besides strategic planning, administration and PR. It is a comprehensive way of thinking and caring. Missionaries are our most precious resources. They are the human vessels through which God's grace and love, righteousness and truth is revealed in our needy world. They are set to be examples for new believers to follow (2Thess 3:9).

It is the leaders responsibility to care for them so that they stay healthy and robust. They help them to



⁵ Detlef Bloecher. CONNECTIONS (Oct 2003), p. 48-53. ReMAP II affirms the Maturation of the Younger Mission Movement of the South.



recover after defeats, comfort in crises and assist through changes. Home office, team and field leaders have a shepherding function on those entrusted to their care, and the standard is the example of our Lord Jesus Christ (Jo 21:16; Acts 20:26). This fundamental understanding is expressed by the Apostle Peter:

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers, not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. 1 Peter 5:2-3

Yet we do not consider the reduction of missionary attrition as an end in itself and to increase missionary retention at all costs. Missionaries can also stay for too long and then hinder the maturing of the National church and the development of local leadership.

But hard places will only be reached by the Gospel through dedicated, experienced long-term missionaries that have carefully learnt the language adjusted well to their culture, living a simple lifestyle in trusted relationships, supported by a caring community and an organisational structure with lean management and effective leadership. This brings home the two biblical issues shepherding and good stewardship.