

A day in the life of an Exiles student: the Sierra Leone Marathon 2014



The evening before:

It is nearly the big day - the marathon is tomorrow! I'm on a checkpoint with two doctors – we are stationed about 8 miles into the 26 point something mile race which means the runners will be reaching us fairly quickly. The marathon is starting early tomorrow morning – aiming to get as many people finished before the midday heat hits and leaving the rest of the afternoon for the festival that is planned! An early start and an early checkpoint means we don't want to risk any delays in the morning – so we're off to our checkpoint tonight! I'm excited – the three of us are camping in a village and will get to spend this evening with the local people. One of their village members is running in the race tomorrow so they are all behind him and excited to see what we are doing in preparation for the big day. We had a bit (!) of a crowd watching us set up our tent and after eating our food, being shown the village by one of the elders and making plans for tomorrow, we settle in for an early night – making sure the tent is fully zipped up to avoid the masses of mosquitoes!



The morning of the race:

We are up early to set everything up – we all know where everything is and what equipment we've got. We have a plan for sick runners (having gone over things with the team yesterday, we recapped it all this morning too!) and we have a plan for lots of runners with minor injuries.

The first runners of the day come through and we aren't really needed – a bit of water and a few coconuts (the race has



provided nearly 50 fresh coconuts that are being cut up and provided as drinks and snacks for the runners coming through!). Several people come through dehydrated and feeling dizzy – not surprising given it's already nearly 30°C and there's been a bout of diarrhoea spreading around camp! We keep them for a bit, give them oral fluids, dioralyte and observe to make sure they're OK. All decide to keep going but have a low threshold for seeking further medical help – we make sure they have enough water and are running with buddies.

A couple of people come through the grazes and cuts where they've fallen on the track. We clean their wounds and patch them up before sending them on their way.

When everyone is through, we tidy up our station, thank the village members and head round to the finish line to help with any unwell people staggering over the line.

The finish line:

We join the team at the finish line and wait to see if anyone needs our help – fortunately most are OK. We hear news that other checkpoints have had lots of runners feeling dizzy and dehydrated – it seems the diarrhoea bug going round has really taken its toll. No-one has needed IV fluids though as we try to push oral fluids as much as possible. Suddenly we are called by a local man to come and see his friend. I go over with one of the senior doctors to see the patient – a young man in his twenties who finished running an hour ago and was feeling unwell. The story we get?

- He's never run long distances before but managed to finish in around 4 hours
- He only drank one packet of water (about 200ml) whilst running
- He hasn't had anything to drink since stopping

Fortunately, despite the story, the young man isn't too unwell and picks up quickly with some oral fluids, rehydration and observation. It is a reminder to everyone though that we need to keep alert – whilst the race has finished, there are still plenty of people around with potential to become unwell!

The festival:

After the race there is a festival held around the finish line – whilst several of us stay by the medical tent and take it in turns to be available if needed, others get to explore and enjoy the cultural experience. It had been a fantastic day and we have had a brilliant team – I can't wait to come back next year!

