



interplast news

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SITI'S NEW FACE

Sixteen year old Siti Aisyah has reason to smile. She has the beginnings of a new face and can look forward to a normal life in her village.

Her appearance is not perfect and more operations will be needed but this young woman can leave behind the stigma of noma, a disease that eats away the flesh. At the age of three, Siti developed a rash on the right side of her face. A sandalwood traditional medicine made no difference so she was eventually taken to a distant hospital. She was successfully treated with antibiotics but was left with a huge facial defect which made eating and drinking difficult, particularly as she grew older.

When she managed to attend school, her classmates teased her because of her deformity so she started using a face washer to hide her appearance. Finally Interplast took Siti in hand and performed the first operation to rebuild her face in Sumbawa Basar in 2005. This involved using a flap of skin and muscle from her forearm transferred to her face using microsurgery. Future operations will refine the appearance of the graft.

Siti wanted to be a teacher when we first met but now her ambition is to be a nurse. When she was discharged from the hospital, I took her to the ferry for the 2 day journey home. She cried with happiness and hugged me as she said goodbye and headed off to start a new life.

Jill Dickinson, RN



Siti before surgery.



Siti after the first operation.
More will follow.

OPEN SMILES

Being part of an Interplast team is a very special privilege. In March 2006, anaesthetist David Ho, RN Tim Stewart and plastic surgeons Jaeme Zwart and myself headed for Suva despite a cyclone hovering off the Queensland Coast and the threat of political unrest in Fiji.

There is no staff plastic surgeon in Fiji and our help was graciously and gratefully accepted by patients and staff at the Colonial War Memorial Hospital.

At present, the hospital is experiencing a dire shortage of the theatre consumables we take for granted in Australia. Sterile gowns, gloves, surgical sponges and swabs were very limited in availability. However, we were able to take with us extra stocks of these items generously provided by St Andrew's War Memorial Hospital in Brisbane.

In all, 69 patients were assessed and 38 operations were undertaken while we were there, the number of cases limited because just one operating theatre was available for our use. Lectures also were given to medical and nursing staff to up-grade their knowledge.

Dr Maloni Bulanauca, a surgical trainee with a keen interest in burns treatment, was present for the majority of the theatre cases. Dr Maloni undertook the day to day care of the patients we treated; we were most impressed by his diligence and gentle manner.

We brought home with us special memories of a people who have very little in a material sense but are very generous in their response to the little we can do to assist them. Their lovely open smiling faces won our hearts.

Dr Del M. Hinckley, plastic surgeon



Bilateral cleft lip before surgery.



Now a chance to be normal.



Interplast Australia is a non profit company incorporated in Victoria founded in 1983 as a partnership between the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and the then Rotary District 980. It provides voluntary medical teams who carry out plastic and reconstructive surgery in developing countries. Programs are actively supported by Rotary Districts and Clubs throughout Australia and New Zealand. Rotarians are members of the Company, the Board and Interplast Rotary Committee.



FIVE DAYS IN BANGLADESH



Colour and movement in Old Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Creating a database may seem like a dry and soulless task but it's one I took on gladly to help Interplast. The data is needed to help plan future programs and to quantify the great work carried out by the surgeons, anaesthetists and nurses.

It soon became evident that collecting data for a hospital in Australia was a totally different scenario to creating a database in a country such as Bangladesh. The only way for me to fully

understand what was required was to go with an Interplast team. Bangladesh in April this year was suggested. Dhaka the capital is hot, humid, crowded and noisy but an amazing city full of life, color and movement. Despite the chaos, it seems to function!

In the 5 days I was there, the Interplast team triaged 200 patients. At times it was confronting and sad but there always seemed to be a sense of hope despite the adversities. The patients and their families were overwhelmingly thankful and even those who were unable to be scheduled for surgery appreciated being seen by the Interplast doctors.

I was touched by the compassion and professionalism of the volunteers in these very challenging conditions. Strong friendships, mutual support and companionship was clearly evident.

I came away with a full appreciation of what would be needed to develop the database; this would not have been possible had I not been "in amongst it". I also came home with the knowledge that the people who support and are involved in Interplast really are making a difference.

Katrina Simms

JOURNEY TO LOMBOK

In early June 2006, I set out on a journey of a lifetime as a Rotary observer with an Interplast team.

No amount of research could have prepared me for this program to Lombok where the indigenous Sasak people make up 90% of the population. The mixture of the tropical climate, the strange smells and the number of people of all ages with obvious cleft lips and disabilities was challenging. The look of desperation in everybody's eyes, hoping that they, or their child, would be the chosen one to be given the opportunity to live a normal life was haunting.

In spite of what seemed like near impossible working conditions, the team undertook 79 patient consultations and performed 55 plastic/reconstructive operations in one week. The patients' ages ranged from a three and a half week old baby girl to a 27 year old man. What this means to the patient, the family and the community is beyond comprehension.

Individual procedures were delicate in nature and took between one and four hours depending on the severity of the cleft palate and/or cleft lip. It was common for the surgeons to suffer

headaches each evening no doubt brought on by the long days, lengthy procedures, unnatural body position, dehydration, heat and the inhalation of the escaped anaesthetic gases.

The conditions were consistent with those of the developing world with overcrowding, no bed linen or pillows and no food for the patients. The family is an integral part of hospital care and is responsible for the provision of all sustenance, medications and personal hygiene needs.

When the team left at the end of the week, the farewell at Lombok's Praya Hospital was an emotional experience, expanding the boundaries of world understanding and peace. In keeping with Interplast's tradition of service, there was a promise to return again next year to continue with this incredible humanitarian program.

PP Pamela Bazin
Rotary Club of Port of Mackay

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POST CHRISTMAS GIFTS

There was no time for the post-Christmas sales. I had joined an Interplast team and was off to Mindanao in the Philippines, an island known for the violent struggles of separatist groups. Thankfully we were nowhere near the conflict.



Keeping watch during surgery in Mindanao

This is a well organized program that was started by Interplast seven years ago. It is a great Interplast-Rotary collaboration. Rotary does all the initial preparation. They send people out to poor villages to find children who require surgery, mostly cleft lips and palates but also burns. Rotary also pays for food and transport and some of the kid's medical supplies as well as some of the costs for the procedures.

Sadly, a lot of little kids receive burns from oil lamps out in the country. One girl was unable to use her hands because of burn scars and adhesions. The surgeons performed an operation which enabled her to use her thumb so she could at least hold things.

My role initially was anaesthetic assistance, pre-op and recovery. In the end I was the only nurse. The team performed 96 operations in nine days on local children who required cleft or burns surgery. Their youngest patient was just 10 weeks old.

An interesting fact I found out is that it costs less than \$500 to perform each operation on Interplast programs – that includes all of our transport and accommodation as well as all operating costs. In Australia, an equivalent operation would be \$5000 or more. This has got to be one of the most cost-effective forms of aid we can give.

What does a patient with a cleft get for \$500? Without an operation, they have difficulty eating, they can't marry and they end up as outcasts, sometimes locked away as a monster. This surgery gives them a chance to be normal. The parents are also made very happy by the work. They come up and hug you and thank you over and over again.

Who needs the Christmas sales. The rewards I received from this one program are worth far more to me than all the missed bargains.

SSWAHS Area Disaster Co-ordinator, Gaye Hudson

NORMAL LIFE IN LAOS

I've been away on thirteen Interplast programs including ten to Laos since 1996 but have rarely had the opportunity to follow up on those who have had operations. Many patients and their families travel long distances and at great expense just to see the Interplast team in the hope they will be suitable candidates for surgery.

So, on my most recent trip to Laos in February this year, it was very gratifying to meet a patient we treated in 2003 and to see what changes had occurred in her life since the surgery. This particular patient was an adult who we met by chance begging outside a restaurant in the Lao capital Vientiane. She had a large bilateral cleft lip and when we first approached her she was very worried about our intentions.

After a couple of meetings on the street and with some friendly encouragement she finally decided to come to Mahasot Hospital to see what surgery could offer. By luck she ended up being the last bilateral cleft lip patient operated on by the brilliant surgeon Harold McComb on his final Interplast visit to Laos.

Three years later she has a child, is pregnant with another and looks very well nourished. She continues to beg outside the same restaurant but appears very happy with her lot in life. She greeted us like long lost friends and was very happy to show off her toddler and to have photographs taken.

It would appear 90-minutes of surgery has enabled her to forge a relationship and lead a relatively normal life in Lao terms - a very pleasing result for us.

Kerrie Westwood, RN



Begging alone in Vientiane.



Cleft repaired, now a growing family.

WOULD YOU LIKE AN INTERPLAST GUEST SPEAKER?

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LIFE CHANGES

The burn contractures, machete wounds, growths and cleft palates all held my interest and I wanted to see them all. I was watching the surgical team perform operations that would change these people's lives.

I was in Madang PNG with Interplast Australia, not as a medical person but as an observer. It was a trip that will remain in my memory forever. When we arrived at Madang Hospital, the doctors, staff and patients were happy to see us even though it was a Sunday. The Interplast volunteers immediately started their assessment of patients, deciding which were possible and scheduling the operations. Everything was done with such compassion and professionalism. However, I soon learnt they

couldn't help everyone and I think that was the saddest part for me.

When the time came for surgery I couldn't seem to get enough. I wanted to look at everything that was going on. Then going to the wards and seeing the children and adults recovering filled my heart with joy. I knew their lives in future would be so different.

I can't express how I feel making this trip to Madang, but one thing is for sure, the patients are not the only ones with changed lives. Believe me, I'll never be the same.

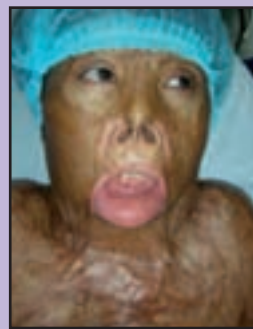
Eileen Doyle

BURNS BURDEN

LPG explosions, electrical accidents on building sites and sulphuric acid burns to the face are just a few ways burns patients in Vietnam are injured. Sulphuric or battery acid is often used during domestic violence, adultery revenge or for family payback.

In the first two weeks of August 2006, Interplast surgeons James Masson and myself, anaesthetist Michael Amos and theatre sister Sue Beavan worked at Cho Ray Hospital in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. Along with about a dozen local Vietnamese doctors, they treated burns scarring and deformity and provided surgical teaching.

The surgical instruments available at the hospital are well used and consequently well worn. They were donated to the hospital 10 years ago and have been in constant use since. The Interplast team members have undertaken to raise \$5000 needed to purchase new plastic surgery instruments and give them to Cho Ray Hospital so the good work of the locals can continue. It's the type of help that's practical and of ongoing benefit to both the surgeons and their patients.



An untreated burn in Vietnam



Five days post-surgery, on the way to recovery

Training is also something of immense value in countries like Vietnam. The Head of the hospital Burns Unit, Dr Tran Doan Dao, an impressive surgeon committed to his patients and the Burns Unit, is a doctor who would really profit from a stint at an Australian burns unit. His visit would be a great way to not only increase his knowledge but also build a relationship between Cho Ray Hospital and an Australian hospital, and therefore strengthen the bond between Vietnam and Australia. Interplast is exploring the possibilities of making this happen early next year.

Allan Meares

FIRE AND PAIN

Imagine the scene. Six-month old Joshua resting by the open fire in a village near Goroka in the Papua New Guinea highlands. His mother has no one to help her so must go a short distance from her baby to collect wood and work in the garden. This domestic scene turns to tragedy when the baby becomes restless and rolls off the low bed into the embers of the fire, unable to get himself away from the intense heat.

It's impossible to describe the trauma that ensued. The mother responded quickly to her baby's cries, but the short contact with the hot coals caused terrible injuries. Severe damage to Joshua's face and hand will make it difficult for this child to have a normal life. An Interplast team of surgeons Peter Sylaidis and Tim Edwards, anaesthetist Ian Klepper and nurse Jenny King on a visit to Goroka some months later treated Joshua along with a number of other patients who had been badly burnt in variety of accidents. There is no way of reversing the damage but surgery can restore function and some flexibility to joints and limbs. A skin graft to this baby's face will at least allow him to close his eye, and releasing the contractures on his hand will let him move his fingers more freely.

Burns have been the most frequent injuries seen by Interplast teams in the 23 years since the organisation was founded. More than 3500 operations have been carried out in that time to treat this type of injury.

Rob Simms



Fire disfigured this baby's face.