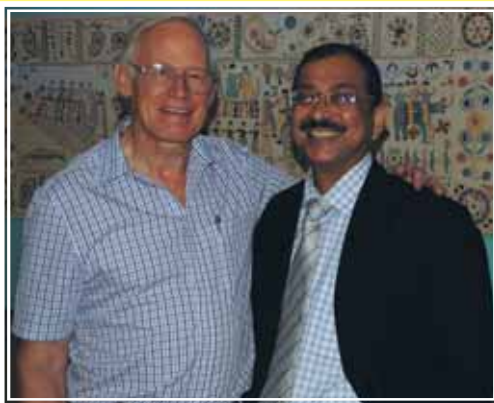


FROM THE CHAIR

In February I travelled to Bangladesh to attend our surgical camp at Sylhet in the north-east of the country. I also scheduled meetings with key project staff at CDD and arranged to visit some of our surgeons at the hospitals at which they operate. I was prepared for a busy week but was really not prepared for the emotional journey.

It was my great pleasure to catch up with our surgical team leader, Professor Shafquat Khundkar.

I am pleased to report that he is recovering (albeit slowly) from his recent illness and has returned to work on a part time basis. He is very passionate about Operation Cleft and is optimistic that he will be well enough to lead our next surgical camp in Jessore.



Shafquat is a truly remarkable man who has given great service to the people of Bangladesh and to Operation Cleft. His fellow plastic surgeons left me in no doubt as to the esteem in which he is held.

The next day, I flew to Parbatipur to visit the LAMB Project located near Dinajpur in the north west. This hospital complex, the site of our first Operation Cleft surgeries in Bangladesh, is an extraordinary organisation. I visited partly out of curiosity, but more importantly, to say thank you to Dr. Robert Bowers. Bob was responsible for the very first cleft repair surgeries we funded during our project trial back in 2005. He is retiring in September and returning home to the USA. Bob has been a stalwart of Operation Cleft and we greatly appreciate all the work that he has done for us over the years.

Whilst at LAMB, I travelled with an outreach worker to outlying areas to visit some village clinics. Jagodish, my guide and interpreter, also arranged for us to catch up with some former patients. This gave me an opportunity to understand the degrees of difficulty that exist for people living in these remote regions.

Travelling any distance for medical treatment is in itself a challenge. There are very few motorized vehicles; the main forms of transport are bicycle and rickshaw and the other alternative is ... you walk. No ambulance service here!



We stopped along the way at a roadside cafe but I declined to partake of the local delicacies.

On arriving at the first village I was introduced to Tapon. He had taken the day off work and told Jagodish he was excited and honoured that the Chairman of Operation Cleft had come all this way to meet him.

No words can explain how humbled I was by this young man's gratitude. Dressed in his best clothes, he had walked for hours to meet me. Tapon only completed grade three and then quit school because he had been teased so much. He said that before his operation, he had no friends because he had also been insulted and ostracized by the people in his village.



After his cleft lip was repaired in February last year, he started playing soccer with the other boys and joined the social committee in his village. His family could not afford for him to resume school so he helps his father in the rice paddies until he can get a better job.

After chatting a while, he put his hand over his heart and with tears rolling down his face, he said, "thank you so much for fixing me".

I have to admit I shed a few tears myself.

Cont. Page 2



FROM THE CHAIR (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

My last stop was our surgical camp at Sylhet Women's Medical College and Hospital. There were forty operations scheduled and a large ward had been set aside as a waiting area for the children and their parents. It was a hive of activity as mothers in their brightly coloured saris (and many fathers) comforted their little ones. They all watched anxiously as each child went off to theatre, and glanced furtively at those returning with mouths swollen and stitches visible. Some parents became very distressed as their children were whisked away to surgery.



Many of these people are uneducated and superstitious. Hospitals are foreign to them and they were fearful that their child would not wake up after the anaesthetic. The courage they showed by entrusting their children to the Operation Cleft surgical team reflects both their desperation and the belief they have that Operation Cleft will give their child a much better life.

I was invited into the very well appointed operating theatre to observe Professor Bari undertaking a difficult cleft palate procedure on an eight year old boy.



THE COST OF A SMILE FOR LIFE - \$250

The ideal age for a cleft lip repair is around 3 months. Thousands of Bangladeshis grow to adulthood with this condition because their family can't afford to pay for the surgery. Your donation will give a child like Ashraful, pictured here with his mother, the chance to lead a normal life. Having the surgery he needs now will prevent a lifetime of misery, torment, illiteracy and ill health.

Help us give him a chance at life.

"His cleft extends to the nasal and ear passages", Professor Bari told me as he shook his head sadly. "It is such a pity that I did not see him when he was eighteen months old. He would have had a really good outcome". He then proceeded with the surgery working hard to effect closure to the palate. On completion of the surgery he added, "his general health should now greatly improve and I am hopeful that he will also have some restored hearing capacity".

Prior to discharge, Dalia, our in-country project co-ordinator, conducted an intensive training session for the parents. She covered post operative care and what to expect of the children over the coming weeks. All parents received an information booklet which included surgeons' contact details in case they had any concerns. Dalia had their full attention throughout the talk and was asked many questions.



For most of the parents, learning about the cause and effect of a cleft condition was a relief. Dalia reassured the mothers that they were in no way to blame for their child being born this way. She also assured them that the widely believed superstition about the cause, *cleaning fish while pregnant during a lunar eclipse*, was simply not true.

It was my great pleasure to receive the heartfelt appreciation of parents and relatives who said: "Thank you; this is a very good thing you are doing for us."

In all, this was a very memorable, and thought provoking, journey. It re-affirmed our belief that Operation Cleft is truly worthwhile and life changing; not just for the children but for the whole family.

The great news - In May this year we completed our 7000th operation.

On behalf of the Operation Cleft Committee thank you for your support; it means so much to so many.


Michael Kirk
Chairman



Your support means so much to so many

VISITING ROTARACTORS



Past District Governor of Rotary District 3280, Mr. Ali Mahbub (3rd from left, back row) was joined by local Rotaractors when he visited

our latest mini surgical camp at the City Hospital, Dhaka. The camp, conducted by Operation Cleft surgeons, Profs. Bari and Das was sponsored by the Rotary Club of Baridhara.

Club President, Syed Ershad Ahmed, pictured to the right of Mr Mahbub, introduced his guests to surgeons and staff and told them about Operation Cleft and its work in Bangladesh.

THE VALUE OF YOUR DONATION - PRICELESS

Without the surgery he needs, the future for this little boy, born with a bi-lateral cleft lip is bleak. Having his condition surgically repaired now will give him so much more than a pleasing improvement to his appearance. **This surgery is truly life changing.**

It could mean the difference between him being illiterate and ostracised all his life, to becoming an educated and productive adult with good career opportunities.

Having the surgery he needs now will give him the chance to reach his full potential.

All this for just \$250 - Priceless

The group, impressed by the structure of the camp, were very moved by the plight of the parents who clutched their young ones protectively as they waited nervously for their turn to come.

Seventeen patients whose ages ranged from four months to twenty five years old, were operated on over the two days. Our surgeons took the opportunity to include five up and coming plastic surgeons and trainees to assist the surgical team. The age ranges and variety of cleft palate and uni and bi-lateral cleft lip conditions made this an invaluable training opportunity.



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MESSAGE FROM A SURGEON

The following email came from an Operation Cleft surgeon working in Parbatipur, Bangladesh. We were so moved by his words that we thought we would share them with you:

“Habiba had her bilateral cleft lip repaired in December last year at age four. Her mother reports that before surgery the child was so ugly the other children in the neighbourhood were afraid of her and were not allowed to play with her. The mother says she (the mother) was also a target of insults from the neighbours for having delivered such an ugly child. In addition she had great difficulty in feeding the child as she was not able to breast feed.



You can see from the picture taken before surgery, a stressed and terrified child who has known nothing but rejection and mocking all her life, clinging to her mother. I remember her well as she screamed and violently struggled when I tried to examine her. Her only solace was her mother's arms.

Look at the transformation in this picture taken last week. A beautiful little girl; smiling, surrounded by friends, with one friend's arm around her. Her mother says that now she is nice looking, allowed to play with the children, can feed easily and is preparing to enter school in January.



Your support for Operation Cleft results in much more than some cosmetic improvement.

It has made it possible for Habiba to be transformed from an ugly to a beautiful child, from a rejected to an accepted child, from fear and stress to a peaceful child. Your help has given her an opportunity for a normal life”.^{sic}

“A Smile for Life” means a brighter future

BIKERS DO IT FOR THE KIDS

Always up for a social ride, motor bike riders got together to raise funds for some cleft repair surgeries for underprivileged children in Bangladesh.

Run by Charlie Bovalino and the Rotary Club of Kangaroo Flat, the ride started at Gateway Park with a breakfast of egg and bacon rolls. Charlie was hoping for 100 riders but was a little disappointed with the numbers. However those that took part had a great day and they are optimistic that the next ride will be even bigger and better.



AMBASSADORS AT HAPPY VALLEY



Joyce & Jessica, attend the German Swiss International School in Hong Kong. They both share a great love of art and some years ago their mother, Dr Lisa So, selected a number of the paintings they had done to use in a calendar she had printed to raise funds for charity.

Lisa, an orthodontist with a special interest in treating congenital cleft, last year selected Operation Cleft as the recipient of funds raised. A small Operation Cleft flier was produced and packaged with the calendars

THE POWER OF HOPE - OPERATION CLEFT

It is every mothers dream that her child be born healthy and grow into a strong and successful adult.

When babies are born with a cleft lip or cleft palate to poor families in Bangladesh, the mothers dreams are shattered.

Your donation helps us give them hope

WE HAVE WAYS



Speech pathology students at James Cook University Townsville, decided to run their own unique fundraiser for Operation Cleft. They had T- shirts printed with;

“Speech Pathology - We have ways to make you talk.”

Meg Rintoul, who organized the printing and sale of the T- shirts, is pictured here handing a cheque for \$400 to Norm Land from the Thuringowa Central Rotary Club.

With an additional contribution from the club, another eight children’s lives have been changed forever.

Speech therapy is a relatively new service in Bangladesh. Many of our patients would benefit greatly from post operative speech therapy but availability of qualified professionals is very limited. Operation Cleft assists in the development and training of local speech pathologists and community health workers by conducting speech therapy outreach programs throughout the year.

before they were sent to friends and colleagues in Europe, Thailand, America and the UK. They were delighted with the response which raised enough to change the lives of thirty four children.

While visiting Bangkok at Christmas, the family were watching the BBC when “Children of the Eclipse” was shown. This multi award winning documentary was filmed on location at our Jessore surgical camp.

Lisa said, ***“We were all really moved and believed our efforts (though very little indeed) are so worthy”.***

Joyce and Jessica will travel to Bangladesh later this year with Lisa, and her husband, an oro-maxilla-facial surgeon. The whole family is excited about the trip and are looking forward to attending a surgical camp. They will see first hand the incredible difference that the project makes to underprivileged children born with a cleft condition in Bangladesh.

Congratulations to Jessica and Joyce who have now become official Ambassadors for Operation Cleft.



The gift you give now will last them a life time

WHY BANGLADESH?

- Approximately 40% of the country's 156 million people live on or below the poverty line. The cost of surgery (around \$AUD250) is almost a full year's income for many of these families.
- A cleft condition is not considered life threatening so is not covered under the country's overburdened public healthcare system.
- Hundreds of thousands of children grow to adulthood with an untreated cleft lip or palate because their family can not afford to pay for the surgery.
- Most children with an untreated cleft, face a lifetime of social isolation, severe depression, malnutrition and ear, nose and throat infections.
- It is estimated that there are around 300,000 people in Bangladesh with an untreated cleft. Another 4,000 - 5,000 babies are born with the condition every year.



WHY OPERATION CLEFT?

Operation Cleft is a Rotary project and as such follows the Rotary code of conduct that exemplifies the core value of integrity in all behaviour and activities.

Operation Cleft:

- Does not discriminate based on religion, age or gender.
- Does not diversify from its core business of providing a free service to underprivileged people of Bangladesh born with a cleft lip or palate.
- Utilises the established healthcare system of Bangladesh rather than the expensive option of flying foreign surgeons in, or patients out of the country for treatment.
- Includes a training component that contributes to the development of plastic surgery and speech therapy as ongoing services to the people of Bangladesh.



Since the project commenced in 2005, more than 7,000 people have had their cleft lip or palate repaired by Operation Cleft surgeons. With your assistance, we will continue funding around 1,000 operations a year.

THE CHILDREN ARE THE FUTURE OF BANGLADESH

Your support will enable us to provide the surgery they need to prepare for the future and make a meaningful contribution to building their nation.

Riaz (pictured below) cried when he looked in the mirror. Just hours after surgery and still in some pain, his tears were **tears of joy**. This 12 year old boy from Takurgaon had his cleft lip repaired in April this year. For the first time in his life, he saw himself as "normal". He asked for the mirror to be left by his bed so he could keep checking that his "new face" was real.



Operation Cleft is not just a pretty face



An international project of the Rotary Club of Box Hill Central Inc. (District 9810) Australia

“A Smile for Life” - an investment in their future

Free cleft repair surgery for underprivileged children in Bangladesh does much more than change the way they look:



Improves educational opportunities - most children with an untreated cleft are illiterate because they do not attend school. They are ostracised by society and are discouraged by a school system that is not equipped to handle children with special needs.

Improves social opportunities - Most children with an untreated cleft have no social network outside their family and are frequently even rejected by them.

Improves general health - Many children with an untreated cleft suffer from severe depression, malnutrition and ear, nose and throat infections.

Improves job prospects - most children with an untreated cleft remain illiterate so employment opportunities as they mature are very limited.



Your gift is a life changing experience

I/we would like to make a donation *monthly *quarterly * Please tick your preferred donation method

* If ticked, the amount indicated below will be charged to your credit card each month or quarter until you terminate the request.

Credit card donations may also be made via PayPal, (our secure online payment facility) - visit www.operationcleft.org.au

\$250 for cleft repair surgery for one child *or* \$..... for operations

I would like to make a donation of \$

My cheque is enclosed (*Cheques should be made payable to Operation Cleft*)

Please charge my credit card - MasterCard Visa
Please print name above (as it appears on your credit card)

Number on card _____ Expiry date ____ / ____

Signature of cardholder

Name
First name Last name Please print the name of your club, business, school or group if applicable

Address State P/code

Telephone H: .../..... B: .../..... Mob: Email:

Please send this completed coupon with your donation to: **Operation Cleft, PO Box 631, Box Hill Vic. 3128**

For further information - Tel: 0414 246851 Email: info@operationcleft.org.au Web: www.operationcleft.org.au

Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible in Australia