



## March 2009 Trip to Bangladesh

The Aussi Bangla Smile team comprising of the team leader surgeon - Dr Hasan Sarwar, two anaesthetists - Dr Knox Low and Dr Danny Briggs, six nurses – Angela Brady, Judy Barlow, Lorraine Clarkstone, Heike DeNeef, Maria Kells and Barbara Mitchell.

We Sydney on March 12, landing in Dhaka, Bangladesh on March 13 where we met Dr Alf Coren who was working with us for our first three days in Dhaka and had arrived the day before us. We were greeted and assisted through customs by Australian Embassy Secretary, Michael Long, and members of the Dhaka and Dhaka Downtown Rotary Clubs.

The next day we visited the Acid Burn Survivors Foundation where we met patients recovering from burns sustained in violent attacks. The Foundation provides medical, surgical and psychological care for men, women and children in their hospital. They also have a rehabilitation network for their patients. In the afternoon we visited Mother Theresa's Orphanage in Old Dhaka run by the most gracious Sisters of Charity. There we found many clean, happy and well cared for children aged from birth to teenage years. There are also facilities for mothers unable to find lodgings. Later we sorted and organised our supplies for the coming two weeks work.

From Sunday March 15 to midday Wednesday March 18 the team commenced work at Bugum Khaleda Zia Medical College Hospital under very difficult and trying conditions. This public hospital had quite poor hygiene, minimal sterilization facilities and the staff were ill-equipped to handle the demands of the surgeries the team were intending to provide. The expertise of our anaesthetic and recovery team was tested to the maximum.

The age of the children was younger than we had anticipated and their nutrition was questionable. Luckily we had anticipated this and brought more adequate suction equipment and resuscitation equipment with us this trip. Nevertheless we were able to successfully carry out 21 operations with the help of the Bangladeshi staff. Three of these were very complicated facial fracture procedures – two taking 8 hours and the third taking 12 hours by Dr Alf Coren. Four procedures were the more complicated cleft palate operations each taking around 3 hours.

Late March 18 we waved goodbye to Dr Coren who was returning to Australia and set off on the 6-hour, very hair-raising and anxious, minibus trip to Chandpur to meet

the Impact Jibon Tari Floating Hospital. To our great surprise some of the staff members from the last trip greeted us with open arms. We coped well with 9 blackouts a day. The team spent a most hectic and enjoyable four days living with and caring for 39 patients and their parents. The staff were most accomplished in their roles and conditions here were very clean.

Many families had travelled hundreds of miles, everyone taking ages to reach us by ferry, tuk-tuk, bus, train, rickshaw or combination of transport – one group of people arriving at 3 in the morning following a 24-hour bus journey. Many had seen the advertisement in their local papers months before to register for surgery. The team organised school backpacks to be purchased, containing pencils, exercise books, geometry sets, maths and English text books, torch and medications for each patient. These were to compensate for travel expenses. We replaced a phone lost in the water by a patient. It was one of only two phones in his village and imperative for outside communication.

Two of the babies here were too malnourished to have their procedures done safely at this time – one 11 months old weighing 4kg and the other 8 months old weighing 3kg. Dr Sarwar organised for us to pay for the admission of these babies to a Dhaka hospital for building up on high-protein feeds and to be healthy enough for surgery when he returns in November.

Each of us shared special moments with all these lovely people who were most grateful for the new smiles and greater opportunities now open to their little ones. We sadly waved them all goodbye. – tears from both parents and members of the team. We were also sad to say goodbye to our gracious and much loved staff on the Jibon Tari

While at Chandpur we had the opportunity to walk through a local village. Seeing their hard working conditions and very meagre living conditions, what continually surprised us is that everyone seems happy. We were also surprised at the large number of patients who came from single-parent families – one parent being deceased. As there is no social security, relatives friends and neighbours provide financial assistance.

Unwilling to risk our lives again on a road trip back to Dhaka we opted to take the ferry. If it sank we reasoned we had a better chance of survival in the water swimming than in a massive bus accident down an embankment. This proved to be a great eye-opener. All the boats were overloaded. People carrying supplies to and from the boats were also overloaded. There is great water pollution from factories and hard living conditions of those living on the water's edge.

Our next experience was at the Square Hospital, a very well-equipped centre. There were also some welcome, familiar faces from the last trip. The team was able to complete some further complicated cleft palate procedures here. With the help of

visiting surgeons and Bangladeshi staff the team carried out another 26 procedures, bringing the total to 86 operations for the project.

Every patient received a parcel containing a koala badge, coloured pencils, paper, Aussie stickers and tattoos, map of Australia with comparisons to Bangladesh, and animal postcards which were supplied by the team and our work colleagues. The project also donated suction equipment to the Jibon Tari and torches (to cope with blackouts and security).

The team minus Dr Sarwar returned on March 29 to waiting friends and family. Dr Sarwar stayed one extra week to follow up as many of the patients as possible.

Everyone would like to thank the visiting Bangladeshi doctors and the staff of all three centres for their contributions. Our lovely friend Urmee was our interpreter last trip and gave her time to work also as a very valuable member of the recovery team as well as helping organise patient lists at the hospitals. Dr Jack who assisted and organised patients pre- and post-op. Dr Bodi and Dr Taariq who operated at all three centres again this trip.

We are most grateful to all who supported the team by donating funds, collecting equipment, supplies, and presents for the children. We would also like to thank the companies who supplied donated equipment. What we didn't use we left to be distributed among the poorer hospitals. We also appreciate the great support we received from our colleagues.

The team also owes a great debt of gratitude to the Rotary Club of Nepean, Rotary Australia World Community Services, and Rotary Club of Dhaka for their great support both in Australia and Bangladesh.

Mostly we would like to thank our friends and families without whom there would be no project.

Thank you for your interest and support,

The Team:

Dr Hasan Sarwar	Dr Alfred Coren
Dr Knox Low	Dr Danny Briggs
Mareshka Sarwar	

Nurses

Angela Brady	Judy Barlow
Lorraine Clarkstone	Heike DeNeef

Maria Kells

Barbara Mitchell