



### **ISLAMABAD 3 – 16 JAN 2011**

On 3 January Mr Charles Viva, Consultant Plastic Surgeon, made a return visit to Islamabad taking an Interplast team of 11 members, 3 of whom themselves originated from Pakistan. We were also joined by an Orthodontist from Karachi.

We escaped the UK' s severe winter only to face bitterly cold temperatures in Islamabad without the benefit of central heating. However, the warmth of the welcome we received from Professor Hamid Hassan and his team at the Holy Family Hospital, Rawalpindi, more than compensated. Originally established in 1927 by the Christian mission of Philadelphia, the hospital has since changed sites and been considerably extended and is now a teaching hospital. The four storey, C shaped building accommodates many specialties and we were kindly given the use of the Surgical Unit with four operating tables.

The formal welcome ceremony commenced with the national anthems of Pakistan and the UK followed by recitation from the Quran and addresses by many of the clinical professionals affiliated to the hospital and Medical College. There were expressions of overwhelming gratitude for Mr Viva's tireless efforts

for “helping suffering humanity” and it was noted that this was his 8<sup>th</sup> camp with a total of over 700 patients having been treated.

One specific message we were asked to convey on our return was that “we are a peace loving nation” and the staff and patients with whom we engaged certainly demonstrated this.

Advanced technology afforded us the opportunity to see telemedicine being used. This facility enabled Mr Viva to see patients on the screen presented by Consultants from hospitals in other locations in Pakistan. His opinion determined whether or not the patients were then transferred for surgery thereby avoiding unnecessary journeys for patients unsuitable for surgical procedures.

Our first day culminated in a mammoth ward round, the Unit being filled to capacity with patients presenting with a wide range of congenital deformities (cleft lips and palates, malformation of hands and feet, facial palsies etc), burns resulting from accidents in the home (scalds, electrical burns and burns from kerosene fires - kerosene is used for heating, lighting and cooking), injuries from other traumas and cancers. Professor Hassan and his team had done an amazing job in preparing and screening the patients so that much of the ground work had been completed and the surgery could commence the following day. There was an air of expectancy on the part of the patients, some of whom had travelled from Kashmir, several hours drive away, and this was their opportunity to receive free treatment – a gift that could improve and even transform their lives. The hospital staff showed great enthusiasm and motivation and totally involved themselves in every aspect of the Workshop. The teams quickly integrated and worked together well, the focus always being the care and welfare of the patients.

For the last three years Mr Viva and Professor Hassan have been closely involved with Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF) in Pakistan, an organisation to which Valerie and Mohammed Khan devote much of their time and energy despite having a young family of four children. Acid victims are often, although not only, young women from the rural community who are caught in the middle of domestic disputes involving marriage arrangements or property

negotiations. The injuries are horrific often affecting the face and robbing them of their identity. The attacks often leave victims with blindness, hearing problems, breathing and swallowing difficulties and restriction of limb function. Future prospects of employment and marriage become almost non-existent. In order to improve appearance and function, often victims need to undergo several operations so we have treated a number of these patients on our recent visits and there is instant recognition when we meet again. We were delighted to hear that Nazeera's book outlining her story has now been printed and will enable her to have an income and support her children. It is a privilege to treat and support our friends whose lives are a constant uphill struggle.

Operating sessions would run throughout the day whilst a continuous flow of out patients would arrive for consultation with Mr Viva and Professor Hassan. Somehow all the patients lining the corridor were seen between theatre cases or during "coffee breaks" etc. Every minute was utilised to maximise the opportunities of treating as many patients as possible.

On the wards our Nurse was constantly in demand dealing with changes of dressings and reassuring patients and families regarding their operations and expected progression. They were discharged with free medication and instructions regarding care of their wound. Our Physiotherapist was also able to offer exercises to improve function of damaged limbs for which skin grafts and revision of scars had been carried out. There were many poor, uneducated patients on the ward accompanied by parents and siblings. In order to make their stay in hospital as enjoyable as possible we provided craft activities, jigsaws, games and simple English and maths. All were eager to engage in the activities decorating the ward with their handiwork. Even the men were keen to participate in the children's card games and dominoes. Children's faces lit up as we arrived on the ward each morning and mothers often shared their stories of family struggles especially where the husband/father had died and financial provision then became critical. However, we also encountered some families who were in better circumstances and were extremely grateful for the opportunity of benefiting from the surgical expertise of Mr Viva.

Security remains a priority in the capital as was evidenced by the road blocks and armed guards positioned at most of the road junctions. Sadly, shortly after our arrival there was news of the assassination of a Punjab Governor in Islamabad. Against this background we also endeavour to build bridges and break down barriers of suspicion and fear whilst meeting the physical needs of local people. Through the Pakistani members on our team we were kindly invited to the ancestral home of an Islamic scholar to meet his friends and share his very generous hospitality. This also proved to strengthen the bridge building between us. In addition, the team were invited to the local television studios to participate in the breakfast programme. In their introduction, the presenters spoke very warmly in expressing their gratitude to the team and all involved in Interplast providing medical care to the needy people of Pakistan. A number of the team were interviewed regarding their particular roles and experiences during the mission.

The fortnight's surgical camp passed quickly and the closing ceremony was soon upon us. Again, Professor Hassan and his team very efficiently presented all the data revealing that 120 patients had undergone surgical procedures, a breakdown of the figures giving helpful categories and highlighting the variety of cases undertaken. It was evident that many of the junior medical staff were enthused and grateful for the opportunity to participate in the Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery Workshop from which they were quick to learn new skills and techniques. The ceremony concluded with many speeches and presentations of certificates including thanks to Mr Javed Majid and Raza Jafer whose generous financial support and practical help have facilitated this and other missions.

On returning home our thoughts and prayers were very much centred around the recovery of the patients and with their families.



**CAN YOU BELIEVE IT?**



**THIS IS DEFINITELY THE  
SAME PATIENT!**

Mr Viva and the team wish to thank Prof Hassan, Prof Afzal Farooqi, Principal of Rawalpindi Medical College and all the hospital staff who helped to make this yet another successful mission. Our thanks also go to the many friends in the UK who donated medicines, dressings, soft toys for the children and monetary contributions.