

INTERPLAST UK
FREE SURGICAL CAMP
QUETTA, PAKISTAN
23 JUNE – 5 JULY 2008

New ground was covered when a team of 13 participants flew into Quetta (on the Afghan border) and were welcomed by the Chief Executive and his staff at the Fatimid Foundation Kidney Centre. The team was led by Mr Charles Viva, Consultant Plastic Surgeon, and included Maxillofacial Surgeons, Hans-Peter Frey, Lei Li, Eva Gudewer and Max Heiland alongside Anaesthetists Dr Roy and Ghalib Mukadam.

Lunar landscape would be a fitting description of the area. The inhabitants were tribal people living in very poor conditions (mud houses). From entering the locked gates of the hospital attended by armed guards, with similar security measures throughout the hospital, we were conscious of the volatile situation which surrounded us but our safety was of paramount importance to our hosts and they provided for us admirably. In fact, in one of the speeches at the opening ceremony it was stated that “either the team must not have been reading the newspapers or they are very dedicated”!

Of the 200 patients already registered, 130 were offered treatment and 120 underwent surgery totalling 150 procedures. A breakdown of the figures are as follows:

Children

Cleft Lip
Cleft Palate
Skin Grafts
Others

Adults

Cleft Lip
Cleft Palate
Skin Grafts
Others

The team was accommodated in the Kidney Centre which was opened two years ago and offered very good facilities with theatre staff who were eager to assist and learn from the surgical procedures and techniques

used. Each and every member of staff at the Hospital left us in no doubt that we were welcomed and appreciated, making every facility available at our disposal. Whilst surgery was in progress in two theatres, patients continuously filled the out patients' waiting room desperately hoping for a miracle cure to their congenital disfigurements and disabling scars and contractures (from accidents with kerosene used for cooking and lighting). Surgery and clinics were therefore running simultaneously so that no time was wasted in meeting the needs of patients, some of whom had travelled many miles bringing with them their family and meagre possessions tied up in a blanket! Although surgery improved many appearances and no doubt will enhance many lives there still remained huge gaps in the treatment and services required by these patients, such as dental treatment, speech therapy etc. Noticing that some patients had little or nothing to eat one of our sponsors kindly arranged for food to be brought into the hospital and all the families benefited from the feast. Provision was also made for a seriously ill patient suffering from kidney failure ensuring that even after our departure she would receive essential dialysis treatment but sadly it seems that at present a kidney transplant is unlikely. Soft toys, creative activities and toiletries were also provided for the patients and their siblings so that their stay in hospital was as enjoyable as possible. They thrived on the attention and were absorbed in their creations! The patients and their parents attempted to verbally express their thanks and gratitude for their long awaited, life changing surgery – the best gift anybody could have given them. It was very humbling and rewarding.

At both the opening and closing ceremonies a number of government ministers and officials were in attendance with the press very much in evidence. Reports and photographs appeared throughout the week in newspapers and on TV. Being the first time such a free surgical camp had been held in Quetta it was obviously very high profile especially for the Kidney Centre which has been very under-utilised since its opening. The many sponsors were duly thanked and all the team members and staff involved in organising the camp were presented with inscribed plaques and gifts. There was no doubt that this had been an extremely successful camp and the invitation was given for a return visit next year. Before leaving the hospital yet another press conference was held with keen interest shown in the results achieved over the two weeks.

In addition to the surgery performed at Quetta, the surgeons had another busy day when we stayed in Islamabad for 4 days on our homeward

journey. This was a whole different scenario involving acid survival patients being the victims of family/marital/property disputes. There were ten patients seen in the clinic and nine were skin grafted by the team. We were very impressed by the dedicated teamwork of Professor Hamid Hassan and Valerie Khan who, along with other professionals, are passionate in their vision for providing treatment and support for these victims whose lives have been severely damaged both physically and mentally. Needless to say, the injuries were horrific including blindness and facial disfigurement. Valerie and the team have opened a centre for this work where patients receive aftercare and counselling etc. It is a highly commendable charity.

Our team returned home safe and sound with many pictures imprinted in our minds of that harsh environment in Quetta where there must still be many thousands of needy cases awaiting surgery. It is with great satisfaction and pleasure that we can reflect on those who have been given a new start in life with improved appearances and function.