



Interplast™

Repairing bodies & rebuilding lives
in the Asia Pacific region

inside INTERPLAST

REPAIRING BODIES. REBUILDING LIVES.

AUTUMN 2015

CRYING MERI

TEAMWORK REBUILDING LIVES IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA



Papua New Guinean woman Helen required reconstructive surgery after she suffered a violent attack by a random man in the street.
Photo: Vlad Sokhin

“ I SAW IN THE MIRROR THAT MY LIP WAS BACK. I WAS VERY HAPPY ABOUT IT... I WOULD LIKE TO THANK CHILDFUND AND INTERPLAST DOCTORS FOR COMING AND PATCHING MY LIP BACK. ”

WARNING: Some readers may find the following story distressing.

Helen is a 40 year old mother of seven from Papua New Guinea who lives with her husband and family in the capital city Port Moresby.

One day in 2011, when she was walking to the shop to buy groceries, Helen was attacked by a “cannibal”. The man bit off Helen’s lower lip and tried to sink his teeth into her throat.

“Suddenly a man attacked me. When I was lying down he fell on top of me and opened his mouth and then started biting my lip. I was shouting for help.”

Helen fought the man off with the help of her husband who heard her screams. They managed to get the attacker to the local

police station. Helen’s husband then took her to the hospital. After spending three days in hospital, Helen went to the police station to initiate criminal proceedings, but discovered that the man had been released due to lack of a complaint.

Unable to afford to go back to hospital, Helen lived without her bottom lip for two years. She found it difficult to eat and felt isolated in her community,

“Sometimes I want to eat but I see plenty of people looking at me in public. I take my food somewhere else where nobody is looking at me.”

The local children were afraid of Helen and called her “vampire”. She felt helpless, “that life which came across to me is not very good for me. I feel sad about myself.”

Although shocking, Helen’s story is not unique. According to UN Women, Papua New Guinean women face among the highest levels of violence in the world. Victims of violence often face social stigma, lack of access to health services and a lack of access to legal support and justice. This can have an impact on their ability to care for their families, participate in their community and earn a living.

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DON'T MISS OUR
UPCOMING FUNDRAISING
EVENTS IN SYDNEY AND
MELBOURNE!
SEE BACK PAGE FOR
MORE DETAILS.

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OUR INCREDIBLE VOLUNTEERS

Our volunteers are the lifeblood of Interplast. Their contribution is remarkable and their dedication inspiring. Many volunteers give up their holidays to change lives on Interplast programs, and many return time and again.

We're incredibly privileged to have a handful of volunteers who have regularly joined us on Interplast programs since the early 1980's. Some have changed lives on more than 20 program activities. We're also grateful to regularly welcome new volunteers to the fold.

A few of our volunteers recently reflected on what drives them, and what they get out of the experience of volunteering:

"THE GRATITUDE OF PARENTS, GRANDPARENTS AND PATIENTS IS OVERWHELMING. SO TOO IS SEEING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF BETTER SKILLS AND PRACTICES BY THE LOCAL MEDICAL STAFF FOLLOWING EDUCATION SESSIONS AND MENTORING. THE REWARD IS IN MAKING A LASTING DIFFERENCE."

Joanne Oxbrow
Nurse
Interplast volunteer
since 2005



"INTERPLAST REMINDS ME WHY I DID MEDICINE IN THE FIRST PLACE. DURING THE RIGOURS OF MEDICAL SCHOOL AND SPECIALIST TRAINING I LOST SIGHT OF THE BIG PICTURE - TO BE ABLE HELP PEOPLE WHO WERE REACHING OUT FOR HELP. OUR PATIENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES SEEM HAPPY TO SEE US, OFTEN CROWDING AROUND US TO TAKE PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE TEAM."

Herman Lim
Anaesthetist
First time Interplast
volunteer



"A RECENT HIGHLIGHT FOR ME IS THE REMARKABLE ACHIEVEMENT IN BANGLADESH. A YEAR AGO, THEY COULD BARELY DO A SINGLE ANASTOMOSIS (RECONNECTION OF TINY VESSELS). AFTER PRACTICING IN THE LABORATORY EVERY MONTH FOR A YEAR, THEY ARE NOW CONFIDENT AND CAPABLE OF PERFORMING MICROSURGERY INDEPENDENTLY. AN OUTSTANDING ACCOMPLISHMENT."

"MY TWO WEEKS IN BAGUIO WITH THE TEAM HAVE BEEN THE MOST REWARDING EXPERIENCE OF MY 25 YEARS IN NURSING".

Sally McKelvie
Nurse (pictured right)
First-time Interplast volunteer
- 2014



Russell Corlett
Plastic and reconstructive
surgeon
Interplast
volunteer
since 1985

DONATE TODAY

SIMPLY COMPLETE
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ALL DONATIONS OF MORE THAN

CRYING MERI

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE

Photojournalist Vlad Sokhin met Helen when he was travelling throughout Papua New Guinea documenting various forms of violence towards women. Vlad introduced Helen to ChildFund Australia, an international development organisation working to stop violence against women and children in Papua New Guinea. ChildFund then contacted Interplast to see if we were able to assist in providing surgery to restore functionality to Helen's lip.

Interplast put ChildFund and Helen in touch with local surgeons at Port Moresby General Hospital. In 2013 Helen was operated on by Interplast volunteer Mr Simon Donahoe and local doctor Dr Morath Maire during one of Interplast's mentoring visits to Port Moresby. ChildFund provided logistical support to make Helen's surgery possible, including helping her travel to and from the hospital for her appointments and keeping her updated during her treatment.

Helen's story is an example of the many people and organisations that are often involved in making Interplast's work possible. We regularly work in partnership with both local and international organisations to restore hope and dignity to patients, including Helen. In fact, we couldn't achieve much of what we do without these partnerships. Partner organisations frequently assist us by linking patients' referrals to local health services, providing post-operative rehabilitation services, and supporting logistics on the ground such as visas, medical registration and surgical equipment.

When Helen returned home from hospital, she and her family were overwhelmed with happiness, "I saw in the mirror that my lip was back. I was very happy about it. My husband and all my friends, my relatives, they all surrounded me. Some hugged me, some kissed, some were crying. They were very happy about me. I would like to thank ChildFund and Interplast doctors for coming and patching my lip back."

Helen has become an advocate and spokeswoman against gender-based violence in Papua New Guinea. She is featured in ChildFund's Stop Violence campaign, calling for more women to stand up against violence in their homes and communities.

"I would like to encourage all women in Papua New Guinea to come out and share your story. Don't be afraid and the help will come."



Helen's story demonstrates how Interplast works in partnership to rebuild lives in many different ways. There's so much more work to do.

To join us in partnership and support our work in Papua New Guinea, return the attached donation slip or donate securely online at www.interplast.org.au

Helen's story was documented in Vlad's book, *Crying Meri: Violence Against Women in Papua New Guinea*. Meri means 'woman' in Tok Pisin, the local language.

For more information about gender-based violence in Papua New Guinea, visit: www.vladsokhin.com www.childfund.org.au

COMPLETE AND RETURN THE ATTACHED
OR VISIT WWW.INTERPLAST.ORG.AU

AN \$2 ARE TAX-DEDUCTIBLE.

**YOUR SUPPORT
CHANGES LIVES!**

FIJIAN SURGEON FLIES SOLO THANKS TO INTERPLAST

“ THESE INCREDIBLY REWARDING OUTCOMES PROVIDE MORE SOLID EVIDENCE OF THE VALUE OF OUR TRAINING, AND FURTHER CEMENT OUR COMMITMENT TO THE TRAINING AND MENTORING WE HAVE BEEN UNDERTAKING OVER THE LAST 31 YEARS. ”

THE REWARDING IMPACT OF INTERPLAST TRAINING

After receiving ongoing training from Interplast and using equipment shipped from Australia, a Fijian surgeon was able to perform a life-changing procedure for the first time.

In September, Dr Semesa Matainacake performed microsurgery to repair a wound in a man’s scalp. The patient had suffered an electrical burn and as a result, an extensive part of his skull was exposed. Dr Semesa performed a procedure called a free latissimus dorsi muscle flap, which involved taking muscle from the man’s back and using it to cover the exposed skull bone. A skin graft was then used to cover the muscle.

It was the first time Dr Semesa had performed the procedure independently, supported significantly by training and resources provided by Interplast. Dr Semesa participated in two of Interplast’s Advanced Applied Reconstructive Surgical Skills workshops held in Hobart in 2013 and 2014.

Dr Semesa performed the surgery on the man’s scalp using a microscope donated by Hobart Private Hospital.

The microscope allows re-attachment of tissues such as arteries and veins that are too hard to see with the naked eye. The microscope is a large, heavy and fragile piece of equipment, and getting it to Fiji was not an easy feat. Thanks to some meticulous servicing, packing and shipping, the microscope safely made the journey from Hobart to Suva.

Interplast worked with a number of people, including Associate Professor Frank Kimble, a Hobart-based plastic and reconstructive surgeon to transport the microscope. Associate Professor Kimble is one of many dedicated Interplast volunteers who have been involved in Dr Semesa’s training and the support required to develop a plastic surgery unit in Fiji.

Associate Professor Kimble recently named this work as the highlight of his career. He said, “three years ago, a very talented and promising young Fijian surgeon (Dr Semesa) came to spend some time in the Plastic Surgery Department in Hobart. What was supposed to be a year turned into two and the surgeon got a very good grounding. When he returned home, we



Left to right: Dr Ashwin Pai, Dr Pita Sovanivalu, Dr Semesa Matainacake in Fiji with the microscope donated from Hobart General Hospital

helped set up a Plastics Department, and Dr Semesa recently did his first successful free flap on his own. He is busy setting up a fine unit and very challenging referrals are coming his way. This to me has been the highlight of my career so far.”

These incredibly rewarding outcomes provide more solid evidence of the value of our training, and further cement our commitment to the training and mentoring we have been undertaking over the last 31 years.

TURIA PITT’S INTERPLAST GALA NIGHT



You’re invited to join Interplast ambassador Turia Pitt for an extraordinary night at the Interplast Gala in Sydney.

Kick up your heels Great Gatsby style and celebrate Turia’s incredible passion for Interplast’s work. Featuring 2GB’s Ben Fordham as MC and taking place at the iconic Doltone House, don’t miss this very special night.

When: Thursday April 16
Tickets: \$135
Tickets: www.trybooking.com/GLEX

SAVE THE DATE MELBOURNE

A special evening with Turia will be held in Melbourne on June 19. For full event details visit www.interplast.org.au

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