



Interplast®

INSIDE INTERPLAST

REPAIRING BODIES AND REBUILDING LIVES IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION

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Interplast celebrates 5 years in Masbate



Interplast volunteers celebrate five years with the local team at Masbate Provincial Hospital in the Philippines.

Making a difference can take more than one visit.

Building relationships and community awareness start with one visit but are cemented over many years. Thanks to our supporters, Interplast is often able to send surgical training teams on annual visits over a number of years.

Our program in the Philippines is one example of this approach.

Interplast has partnered with Filminera Resources Corporation and Phil. Gold Processing Refining Corporation to deliver i-smile, an annual surgical training program at Masbate Provincial Hospital since 2014.

On the initial program, Interplast saw older children with untreated cleft lips and palates. Ideally, surgery occurs as early as possible to minimise feeding and speech problems.

While surgery repaired the clefts, the lack of early intervention meant the patients continued to experience speech problems.

With each Interplast visit, the hospital staff learned more about how best to manage complex cases such as clefts. At the same time, the Masbate community increasingly became more aware of Interplast and the importance of bringing their young children to the hospital for early treatment.

As a result, the program predominantly treated clefts in babies and toddlers, but after five years, i-smile has expanded to include burn injuries. This is largely due to the relationships and community awareness that Interplast has nurtured, and thanks to funding from supporters.

Nelly Hartley, a perioperative nurse who has volunteered on this program every year, said continuity is beneficial for the surgical team, local partner hospital and patients.

“Everything flows much better, and the more you work with the same team, the more you understand each other,” she said.

“This also applies to our working relationship with the staff at the hospital. We watch them grow professionally and become more confident as we help them with complex cases.

“We also develop trust with the patients because they too get to know us over the years.”

Nelly recalls the case of a young woman called Rosemarie, who was badly burned as a young child. She developed severe contractures on her left leg, left elbow, left wrist and hand. She could not straighten her leg, making walking very difficult.

She was hunched over and walked with a limp. Her injury was so severe, she was unable to go to school and she had little hope for her future.

“Rosemarie was 23 years old when she first saw us during our inaugural program in 2014, but we didn’t have the time to operate on her on that occasion,” Nelly said.

“She travelled a great distance to return the following year for her first surgery to release the contracture of her leg.

“She can now walk upright and without a limp. She has returned every year since to have further surgery on her elbow, hand and fingers.

“Rosemarie can not only walk again, but as a woman in her mid-twenties, she has returned to primary school education and is excited about her prospects for a better future.”



Rosemarie has benefitted from multiple surgeries over time, thanks to funding that allows Interplast to visit Masbate annually.

“ROSEMARIE CAN NOT ONLY WALK AGAIN, BUT AS A WOMAN IN HER MID-TWENTIES, SHE HAS RETURNED TO PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATION AND IS EXCITED ABOUT HER PROSPECTS FOR A BETTER FUTURE.”



Pictured is Shirley providing hand therapy to Emma who could start bending her fingers three days after surgery.*

**Not her real name.*

Treating and training go hand-in-hand: an occupational therapist's perspective

Emma*, a 32-year-old mother of two young sons severely cut her fingers when her knife slipped while gardening. The wounds healed but she was unable to bend the right ring and little fingers of this hand and was no longer able to form a grip. Emma's tendons had been cut.

During Emma's surgery at Honiara National Referral Hospital, Interplast surgeons mentored local surgeons, teaching them how to use one of Emma's wrist tendons as a graft to replace the cut tendons.

After surgery, Interplast occupational therapy volunteer, Shirley Collocott, made a protective splint and taught Emma how to perform safe exercises to prevent the tendons from hardening as scar tissue.

Emma was thrilled that her fingers were able to bend again only days after surgery.

Simultaneously, Shirley was teaching local therapists how to make the splints and how to prescribe suitable exercises.

Shirley Collocott is a hand therapy specialist who has volunteered with Interplast Australia and New Zealand since 2016, providing hand therapy, and training and mentoring in this specialty to people in the Solomon Islands.

"I particularly like Interplast's approach because it focuses on education and upskilling local staff, as well as treatment for patients who would otherwise not have had access to this," Shirley said.

In New Zealand, Shirley is an occupational therapist and Hand and Upper Limb Research Coordinator at Auckland Regional Centre for Plastic Reconstructive and Hand Surgery and National Burn Centre.

"It was great to be able to use my skills in hand therapy and scar management in Honiara to treat patients who had received surgery from the Interplast volunteer surgical team," Shirley said.

"I also really enjoyed the time spent teaching the local therapists who were very welcoming and keen to learn."

In the Solomon Islands, trauma caused by bush knife attacks and burns scarring are common, and result in disability, pain and isolation. In developing countries, poverty is compounded by disability.

Hand surgery is a commonly performed procedure by Interplast surgeons and hand therapy plays a crucial role in recovery and rehabilitation.

Many Interplast patients are now able to use their hands and fingers to return to work or caring for family members, or in some cases, are also able to use their stumps following amputation to carry buckets and other objects necessary for day-to-day living.

"IT WAS GREAT TO BE ABLE TO USE MY SKILLS IN HAND THERAPY AND SCAR MANAGEMENT IN HONIARA TO TREAT PATIENTS WHO HAD RECEIVED SURGERY FROM THE INTERPLAST VOLUNTEER SURGICAL TEAM,"



Pictured is Shirley (seated) teaching local allied health staff how to make a forearm thumb spica (thumb splint) during a splinting tutorial.

Melbourne's top plastic surgery and burns experts join Interplast's first South Asia regional training program in Nepal.

Interplast has delivered its first South Asia regional training workshop in Kathmandu, Nepal. The program brought together surgeons from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Laos, Bhutan and Myanmar, as well as Nepal.

The workshop was presented by four volunteer Interplast plastic surgery and burns specialists, and was hosted at the Kirtipur Hospital in Kathmandu, thanks to the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

Burn injury is a global health problem with a high prevalence in developing countries. In Nepal, burn trauma cases cause more than 55,000 injuries each year. Burn-related mortality in the region is high.

Dr Shankar Man Rai, head of the Cleft and Burns Centre at Kirtipur Hospital, is passionate about bringing more attention and resources to burn treatment and prevention in Nepal. Dr Rai played an integral role in facilitating Interplast's regional training pilot program in South Asia.

Plastic surgeon and head of the Victorian Adult Burn Unit at The Alfred, Ms Heather Cleland, and her colleague and burn development nurse, Louise Higgins, joined the Interplast Nepal team alongside plastic surgeon and former head of the Department of Surgery at St Vincent's Hospital, Professor Wayne Morrison and paediatric plastic surgeon and former head of plastic surgery at St Vincent's Hospital, Professor Anthony Penington.

Sri Lankan surgeon, Dr. Kavinda Rajapakse, appreciated the opportunity to learn from industry leading experts.

"This workshop has enabled me to improve and implement better plastic surgical care for my country and also realise where we stand in health care in the region," he said.

While in Nepal, Interplast CEO, Prue Ingram, signed a new three-year agreement with the Public Health Concern Trust (PHECT), a key local partner for surgical and training programs in Nepal.

"THIS WORKSHOP HAS ENABLED ME TO IMPROVE AND IMPLEMENT BETTER PLASTIC SURGICAL CARE FOR MY COUNTRY AND ALSO REALISE WHERE WE STAND IN HEALTH CARE IN THE REGION,"



Interplast volunteers awarded Queen's Birthday Honour

Interplast volunteer and anaesthetist, Dr David Pescod has been awarded an AO (General Division) in the Queen's Birthday Honours List. Dr Pescod was recognised for his distinguished service to medicine, and to Australia-Mongolia relations, particularly through the provision of surgical and anaesthetic care, and to health education and standards.

Dr Pescod has volunteered with Interplast since 2003 and is a passionate advocate for safer surgery. He became Interplast's first Country Coordinator for Mongolia in 2009 and has visited the northern Asian country 11 times, in addition to 10 visits to other Asia Pacific countries with Interplast.

Together with the Australian Society of Anaesthetists, Dr Pescod has cemented a solid relationship with the Mongolian Society of Anesthesiologists advancing anaesthesia training – and the profession more broadly – in the region. As a result, deaths due to anaesthetic complications have significantly dropped, and local anaesthetists have the skills and resources to on-train up-and-coming anaesthetists in their own hospitals.

The Mongolian government formally recognised Dr Pescod's commitment and service to their community by awarding him the Medal of Service to Mongolian Life in 2011.

This year, Order of Australia Honours were also awarded to Interplast Company Member, Professor David Watters, and Rotarian and Interplast District Coordinator, Dr Richard Wilson.

Congratulations to Dr Pescod, Professor Watters and Dr Wilson on this achievement.





The close-knit Laos volunteer team paid their own tribute to Dr Chris Lowry with tailor-made Team Lowry t-shirts.

Team Lowry celebrates final visit

Anaesthetist, Dr Chris Lowry, has been a valued volunteer with Interplast since 1987 and has participated in 33 surgical, training and needs assessment programs across nine Asia Pacific countries. He first visited Laos with Interplast in 1999 and hasn't looked back; Chris has been on 21 programs to Laos in the past 19 years.

This year, Chris celebrated his final program with Interplast in Vientiane, Laos.

Interplast CEO, Prue Ingram, said Chris has been a key contributor to the development of an exceptional surgical and training program in Laos, creating strong and enduring relationships with the local Laos medical community.

"Chris has also contributed to many Interplast publications over the years, with his remarkable photographs and we will also miss this input," she said.

"Interplast and our Laos partners will always be very grateful for the many years of service generously shared by Chris over the years, and he will be missed."

Chris recalls his earlier trips were mostly operating on children with cleft lips and palates, but the focus shifted towards capacity building.

"There was a growing need to share knowledge and train local doctors, so they could become independent," Chris recalls.

"I have always enjoyed teaching and over the years, our training programs have exposed me to complex surgeries that I haven't seen in a long time, so I am learning too."

Chris says he has met many great people during his time at Interplast, and he's impressed as to how well a group of strangers can work well together.

"The type of people who volunteer often relate well to each other," he said.

"I'm amazed that you can go to another country and meet people from Australia for the very first time, then start working well with them from day one as if we have worked together for years."

Interplast's annual Laos surgical and training programs are funded by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) and generously supported by the Rotary Club of Kenwick and individual donors. The surgical team is supported in Laos by the Women's International Group (a group of expatriate women living in Laos) and the Australian Embassy.



Dr Chris Lowry has mentored many local doctors at Interplast partner hospitals over the past 31 years of his service. Pictured here is Chris (right) with Dr Vanpheng Norasingh, who is Head of Anaesthetics at Mahosot Hospital, Laos.

Burned at four years old, Houphan is rebuilding her life

Houphan (pictured) was severely scalded with hot water when she was only four years old. The burns scarring that followed not only significantly disfigured her, but drastically reduced the movement and function of her right arm and her neck.

After two operations by Interplast volunteer surgical teams - who worked alongside local surgeons - in Laos, Houphan's burns contractures were released, enabling her to regain full movement of her neck.

Following the latest operation in 2018, Interplast volunteer hand therapist Sharon Goldby worked with local medical staff to design and construct a long-term head and neck splint to stabilise Houphan's head in a neutral position and to protect the healing skin graft from infection.

Houphan must wear this splint full-time for six months.

The team also worked closely with Houphan's parents, helping them understand how to fit the splint and the importance of its role in preventing further contractures.

Houphan has endured years of pain and isolation because of her burns contractures, but today as a strong and brave 14-year-old, she is well and truly on the road to recovery.

You too can be part of the Interplast story, helping to change the lives of people like Houphan. Please donate to Interplast. All donations \$2 and over are tax deductible and will enable Interplast to continue sending volunteer medical teams to help repair bodies and rebuild lives in the Asia Pacific region.



Houphan and others like her will need ongoing surgery to regain movement and function, and more importantly, her independence.

Donate today

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If you wish to receive [Inside Interplast](#) by email only, please email us on: contactus@interplast.org.au



Yes, I want to help people like Houphan get the surgery they need!

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250 - 290 Spring Street, East Melbourne, VIC 3002

ABN: 59 006 155 193