



Interplast™

# INSIDE INTERPLAST

REPAIRING BODIES AND REBUILDING LIVES IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION

EDITION 1 2017



*Dr Joe McGuinness carries a sedated child from the operating theatre after surgery on a 2008 Interplast program to Cagayan de Oro in the Philippines.*

## 'BIG FELLA MAKIM SLEEPIM FOR CUTTIM' FOR LAST TIME

**Anaesthetist Joe McGuinness is retiring after almost 30 years of volunteering for Interplast.**

Dr Joe McGuinness has been volunteering with Interplast for more than half his working life. But now, after a staggering 31 programs to countries across the Asia Pacific, Joe is about to commence a well-earned retirement.

“I can’t tell you how much fun I’ve had with Interplast. Well, not all fun,” he says with a laugh. “There’s been some hair-raising moments, but it’s been fantastic.”

Joe’s invaluable contribution to Interplast has been just one aspect of a 50-year anaesthetics career. He graduated in medicine in 1964, and started as an anaesthetic registrar in 1966. Although most of his working life has been spent at St Vincent’s Private and Public Hospitals, his skills have taken him around the world in a variety of roles.

Joe was first introduced to Interplast

in 1988 by plastic surgeon Dr Michael McGlynn, who was putting together a team for a surgical program in Solomon Islands and needed an anaesthetist with experience in paediatrics.

That first trip was an introduction to the complexities of operating in developing countries, but it didn’t dampen Joe’s enthusiasm and he kept coming back for more, driven by a love of travel, working with children, taking on challenges and, ultimately, making a difference.

On that first trip, Joe and Michael were interviewed on local radio. When he explained his anaesthetist role, the interviewer said there was no local word to use, so he explained it in Pijin as ‘big fella makim sleepim for cuttim’, a lovely description Joe still uses.

“Somebody once asked why I give up two weeks of private work to go and work for nothing,” says Joe. “It’s the benefits you get from seeing the relatives when they see their kids afterwards. It’s worth more

than any cheque that you could get.”

He says knowing that you’re helping to improve quality of life for so many people is a motivator, “but we don’t get too carried away with it”.

“About five years ago when we arrived on one of the trips to the Philippines, we looked down the corridor and there were 104 kids with cleft lip and palates,” he says. “That’s more than they do in Sydney and Brisbane each year, and we were expected to do the whole lot in two weeks. So you’re overcome with the numbers. You don’t get too carried away with the ‘oh, aren’t we great’. We’re there to do a job and so we just get down and do the job.”

Michael McGlynn points out that when you add up all of Joe’s programs, you realise that he has given more than a year of his life to volunteering for Interplast.

“It’s a significant portion of your spare time spent doing things for others. He

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# THE DONATED SKIN THAT SAVED TURIA'S LIFE

Human skin tissue is essential for treating burns patients all around the world. You can help.

Our ambassador Turia Pitt recently travelled to the USA with her fiancé Michael to learn more about the skin donations that saved her life just over five years ago.

When Turia was caught in a grassfire in Western Australia in 2011, she suffered burns to 65 per cent of her body, requiring surgeons to remove all of the damaged skin. The wounds needed to be covered to reduce the risk of infection; the best dressing for a burn wound is human skin from a donor, as it helps to fight infection and regulate body temperature.

But there was no human skin available in Australia at the time, so the surgeons had to cover Turia's wounds with a plastic skin substitute. Her body didn't respond well, and she slipped into a critical condition.

Turia's surgeons embarked on an urgent worldwide search for available human skin, and they found some in the USA.

But at that time it was illegal to import human tissue into Australia, and Customs wouldn't let the package through. The surgeons had to make it very clear that, without the skin, Turia would be dead by the end of the day. The skin was allowed

## HELP OUR INTREPID TREKKERS CHANGE FUTURES

In May, more than 30 courageous people will trek with Turia Pitt to Everest Base Camp in Nepal to raise money for Interplast.

Head to <http://turiaseveresttrek.gofundraise.com.au/> to donate and push Turia and our amazing team past their fundraising goal of \$200,000!

Special thanks to our sponsor, Mountain Designs, for their ongoing support.

**TACKLE YOUR OWN CHALLENGE**  
Our new fundraising campaign, Active Interplast, has launched and we're offering a range of events to help you reach your 2017 fitness goals.

Head to [www.interplast.org.au/activeinterplast](http://www.interplast.org.au/activeinterplast) to find out more.

through and it was rushed to the hospital.

"Michael tells me that within hours of the skin being used on me, my vital signs started improving one by one," says Turia. "Within a few days I was stable."

"I found all of this out when I woke up a month later in hospital in Sydney. It was mind blowing because I had never even realised that tissue donation was a thing!

"Organ donation made sense to me – most of us understand what a donated heart is used for, and we understand what a donated liver is used for. But I had never realised the importance of tissue donation because I had never even thought about what it was used for."

The skin that saved Turia's life came from 16 different donors. Since then, Turia has gone on to achieve amazing things despite the impact of her injuries, including leading Interplast fundraising treks to the Great Wall of China, the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu and the Kokoda Track, cycling her bike around Australia and competing in Ironman events, including the Ironman World Championships in Kona, Hawaii.

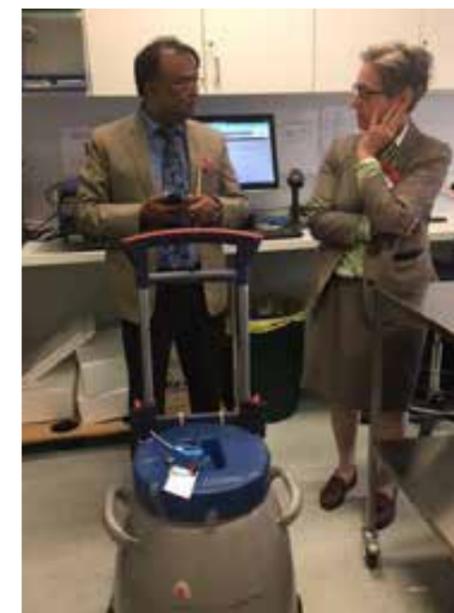
This coming May, Turia will take on her next challenge when she leads an Interplast fundraising trek to Everest Base Camp (see sidebar).

But the reality is that although donor rates in Australia and New Zealand have improved, there are still not enough donors, and many people are not as fortunate as Turia.

In many of our partner countries such as Nepal and Bangladesh, there is a lack of both donated skin *and* ways to store it. Most developed countries have facilities for this purpose, such as skin banks.



ABOVE: Turia hugs one of the team members from the US charity that helped provide the skin donations that saved her life. ABOVE RIGHT: On a recent visit to Australia, Dr Mohammad Nashir Uddin visited the Burns Unit at the Alfred Hospital, and then he travelled with the head of the Burns Unit, Dr Heather Cleland, to visit the Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria, where this image was taken. The canister in the foreground is used for freeze-storing skin tissue.



Dr Mohammad Nashir Uddin, a plastic and reconstructive surgeon from one of our local partners in Bangladesh, says more than 600,000 people in his country suffer major burns injuries every year. The World Health Organisation reports more than 170,000 of those are children.

"But we have only 75 plastic surgeons, who cannot manage all the patients," says Dr Nashir. "We are getting more and more patients with electricity burns, and most of them are young adults."

He says that when a patient has burns to more than 30 per cent of their body, they require significant amounts of skin or other dressings. As Bangladesh does not currently have a skin bank, there are not enough dressings for these patients, and many die.

"If we had a skin bank, we would save more lives," says Dr Nashir.

We are now exploring ways to support Bangladesh to establish an effective skin bank, along with supporting our partners in Nepal and Bangladesh to explore new techniques for managing burns when they don't have access to enough human skin tissue. This is in addition to our ongoing training of specialist surgeons, which includes burns management skills.

During her visit to the US, Turia was able to meet some of the people who were directly involved in preparing and sending the skin tissue that saved her life.

"I've learned that one donor can help to save and heal the lives of up to 100 others. A pretty incredible number but as a donor recipient, I know the impact of that gift reaches so many more."

"I hope that you register to be a donor and I hope that you have a conversation with your friends and family about your wishes. Because, really, I can't think of a more impactful gift than deciding to become an organ and tissue donor."

Dr Nashir's visit to Australia was funded by a private donor. Training for Nepali and Bangladeshi surgeons is funded by the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Australian NGO Cooperation Program.

Find out more about how you can become an organ and tissue donor.

In Australia: [www.donatelife.gov.au](http://www.donatelife.gov.au)  
In New Zealand: [www.donor.co.nz](http://www.donor.co.nz)

You can help our partners treat burns patients. Donate now: [www.interplast.org.au](http://www.interplast.org.au)



Joe McGuinness with his son Daniel, a nurse, on his final Interplast program, again to Cagayan de Oro in the Philippines, in late 2016.

## 'THE COOLEST, CALMEST, MOST CONFIDENT ANAESTHETIST I'VE COME ACROSS'

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loves it. He's just one of those people. He's 76 and he's only just starting to slow up now," says Michael.

"He's got to be the coolest, calmest, and most confident anaesthetist I've ever come across. If there's something that might be a crisis for someone else, for Joe it's just a problem to be solved and it's solved very quickly."

Michael says these qualities are absolutely critical for an anaesthetist working in developing countries.

"If you have a problem in a hospital anywhere in Australia, public or private,

there's always someone in the theatre next door or down the corridor who can come and help you," he says. "But over there, often, when there's a problem, you're usually it. So you need to be cool, calm and collected."

Michael says these qualities were complemented by Joe's care for children.

"He just handles children beautifully," says Michael. "He's got his patented technique for carrying kids that he always teaches the locals before we leave."

While helping countless families across the region, Joe has also been fortunate to share the Interplast journey with his own

### LEAVE A LEGACY LIKE JOE

Joe McGuinness leaves an amazing legacy for Interplast after three decades of volunteering. You can leave a legacy too – sign up for regular donations or leave a gift in your will. Fill out the attached form or head to [www.interplast.org.au/donate](http://www.interplast.org.au/donate) to find out more.

family. His wife Ruth, also an anaesthetist with experience in paediatrics, joined him on six programs, and later his son Daniel, a paediatric nurse, worked alongside him on two programs – including Joe's final

program to the Philippines at the end of 2016.

Impending retirement doesn't mean Joe will slow down, with plans for more travel, devoting more time on his passion for fly-fishing, and, hopefully, ongoing visits to maintain friendships established through his Interplast work.

"I'm looking forward to it. I've got lots of things to do," says Joe. "I'm quite sad about Interplast, and that's why I was very pleased to be asked by Kevin Ho if I'd go on this last trip in September because I thought I'd done enough. And then it just so happened that they said 'come on Joe, one more time'."

# MYANMAR TRAINING PROGRAM MAKES AN IMPACT



After Interplast provided the opportunity for Nurse San San Maw to visit Australia for a six-week training program, a number of positive changes in nursing practices at the Yangon General Hospital have been evident.

## The country's surgeons and nurses continue to grow in confidence and skills.

Interplast's investment in training Myanmar's medical professionals is paying dividends, with significant improvements observed in the nursing and surgical skills of local staff since our first program in 2001.

Since that first visit, at the request of our local partners, the program has expanded to three trips a year with a major emphasis on training nurses and plastic surgeons, along with supporting medical professionals to come to Australia for specialised training opportunities.

We have also recently added anaesthesia training to the program, in partnership with the University of Medicine 1, Yangon.

For the past three years Dr Myitzu Win has been a focus of our training visits after she was selected as the first candidate for the new Doctorate degree in Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery in Myanmar, a program we support through the clinical mentoring aspects of our program.

Dr Win spent 10 months in Australia across 2015-16 on a training placement at the Alfred and Dandenong Hospitals in Melbourne, supervised by Interplast volunteer plastic surgeon and long-time mentor, Associate Professor Michael Leung.

On the most recent Interplast trip to Myanmar in late 2016, Dr Win sat and passed her final Doctorate Plastic Surgery Examination, with Dr Leung participating as an external examiner. She now only has to present her thesis to the Education

Board and she will be a fully qualified plastic surgeon, a fantastic outcome for Myanmar's plastic surgery program, Interplast's contribution, and most importantly, for the people of Myanmar who will benefit from her skills.

Dr Win will be the first of an increasing number of plastic surgery trainees to graduate, and ongoing Interplast visits will continue to contribute to their growing skills. After the most recent trip to



Interplast and Myanmar plastic surgeons at work, watched by trainees.

Myanmar, the Interplast team reported that the skills of these local surgeons continue to improve – they were doing most of the operative work, supported by our volunteer surgeons.

On the next Interplast visit the local surgeons will do most of the surgical work, with Interplast volunteers on hand simply for advice and backup. It's an exciting development in the program.

Advances in surgical skills need to be accompanied by equally skilled nursing staff, for support during operations, but also for pre and post-operative care.

Senior Nurse San San Maw has participated in a number of Interplast training opportunities in Myanmar, but in early 2016 she came to Australia for a six-week training placement that had a huge impact on her skills.

At the time, Nurse Maw said: "I will return home and do my best to be resourceful and share my experience with my colleagues. Not just those in the plastics unit, but the whole hospital, and colleagues from other parts of Myanmar.

She was true to her word. Interplast teams visiting across last year reported a major cultural shift in nursing practices since Nurse Maw returned from Australia, including improved patient monitoring after surgery, significant improvements in patient record keeping, and more.

With this ongoing integrated approach to building the skills and knowledge of plastic surgeons, nurses and anaesthetists, the impact of Interplast's training will only continue to benefit the people of Myanmar.

*Our surgical and nurse training programs in Myanmar have been funded by a range of supporters, including the Australian Government's aid budget through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Australian NGO Cooperation Program. Dr Win's training in Australia was funded by the Rowan Nicks International Scholarship through the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons. Nurse San Maw's placement in Australia was funded by the Baker Foundation.*

**You can support our work in Myanmar with a secure online donation. Go to [www.interplast.org.au](http://www.interplast.org.au)**

# REPAIRING BODIES, REBUILDING LIVES AND CHANGING FUTURES!

THE DEDICATED AND HIGHLY SKILLED MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS WHO DONATE THEIR EXPERTISE TO INTERPLAST TRULY MAKE A DIFFERENCE ACROSS THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION.

BY GIVING OF THEIR TIME AND TALENT, THEY ARE CHANGING FUTURES. HOWEVER, SKILLS AND CARE ALONE ARE NOT ENOUGH.

## WE NEED YOU TO BE PART OF THE WIDER INTERPLAST TEAM!

Making a financial donation to Interplast every month is one of the most powerful ways to support our work. By becoming a regular donor, you will be equipping us with the ability to continue providing life-changing assistance within the Asia Pacific region.

By giving on a regular basis you provide Interplast with the ability to prepare for lasting change. In turn, this allows us to have a greater positive impact in the communities in which we work.

## HOW DOES REGULAR GIVING WORK?

You determine the amount of your monthly donation and advise us using the attached form. We will charge your pledge to your credit card each month (usually the 15th of the month). At the end of the financial year, Interplast will send you an annual giving statement that can be used for tax purposes.

Additionally, as a valued donor to Interplast, we will keep you informed of our progress by sending regular updates detailing how we are supporting the people of the Asia Pacific region.

## BENEFITS TO YOU

Regular giving is convenient. Each month the amount you nominate is deducted from your credit card, however, you have full control over your giving. You can increase your donation amount or make changes at any time.

Most importantly, you will know that each month you are making a significant contribution to the work of Interplast. Together, we will repair bodies, rebuild lives and change futures!

Here at Interplast, we've been moving our mailing lists to a new, more effective database. This will help us to make sure you only get what you want from us.

If you have previously told us you would prefer not to receive mail from us, our apologies for sending you this newsletter. Please let us know so we can update your information on our new system. You can email us on [contactus@interplast.org.au](mailto:contactus@interplast.org.au), or call on +61 3 9249 1231.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

If you wish to discuss regular giving opportunities with us, please contact the Fundraising Manager on (03) 9276 7410 or [contactus@interplast.org.au](mailto:contactus@interplast.org.au)

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## JOIN THE CHANGING FUTURES FELLOWSHIP

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I am interested in learning more about opportunities to support Interplast in my will. Please send me information regarding bequests.

Please tick this box to remove yourself from future hard copy mailings

Donations over \$2 are tax-deductible.

An annual receipt will be issued at the conclusion of the financial year.

*Any information you provide to Interplast will be treated in the strictest confidence. Interplast will only use your personal details to provide you with the opportunity to contribute to a range of services and facilities that will benefit Interplast programs. Interplast does not rent, lease, or sell your personal details to any other organisation. Interplast Australia & New Zealand respects your privacy. For more information on our privacy policy please see our website at [www.interplast.org.au](http://www.interplast.org.au). Please call us on 03 9249 1231 if you would like to be removed from our mailing list.*

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**FUNDS RAISED THROUGH THE INTERPLAST REGULAR GIVING INITIATIVE WILL BE USED TO SUPPORT OUR WORK ACROSS THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION.**