



Interplast®

# INSIDE INTERPLAST

REPAIRING BODIES AND REBUILDING LIVES IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION

EDITION 1, 2018

## CHANGING LIVES IN REMOTE PNG



Professor Ashton with Dr Akule, Dr Bita and patients.

In September 2017, people from some of the most remote areas of Papua New Guinea (PNG) received life-changing surgery from a visiting Interplast team thanks to a ground-breaking program implemented in partnership with mining company PanAust.

Most of our surgical programs across the Asia Pacific take place in the towns with larger populations, with people in remote areas still needing to overcome distance, geography, transport and costs to get to our teams – a major challenge when you have a significant medical issue.

Alongside PanAust, we have been able to make it easier for people in one remote area to access the surgery they need. In November 2016, PanAust supported Interplast to send a small team to conduct surgical assessments of villagers in communities close to the company's Frieda River Copper-Gold Project in remote north-western PNG. Some of these communities were so remote that the team had to travel by helicopter and boat.

Then in September last year, PanAust brought a number of these patients and their carers from their remote communities to Vanimo on PNG's north coast near the Indonesian border, where an Interplast team provided much-needed surgery. The team was led by Professor Mark Ashton, current President of the

Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons, and included anaesthetist Dr Ian Hogarth and theatre nurses Jo Pertzelt and Linda Ferguson.

Five of the 42 patients identified during the 2016 needs assessment visit were seen by the Interplast team in Vanimo, along with a number of other patients from the local area. In total, 17 procedures were completed during the week-long program.

While operating, Professor Ashton was also teaching the local general surgeon, Dr Stanley Bita, and PNG's only plastic surgery trainee, Dr Akule Danlop Awasano, how to perform these kind of surgeries.

Interplast supports Dr Akule, who is based in Port Moresby, to accompany all of our surgical programs wherever they take place in PNG to ensure he gets regular opportunities to develop his plastic surgical skills. We send about

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Professor Ashton teaches Dr Akule how to use his new surgical 'loupes', specialised surgical glasses with magnification lenses that are used by surgeons when they don't have access to a microscope. The loupes were funded by Rotary District 9455. Photos: Woodrow Wilson

# PACIFIC SURGEONS DEVELOP THEIR SKILLS IN HOBART

In November last year, with the help of Rotary, we brought 14 surgeons from across the Pacific to Tasmania for a two-day plastic surgery skills workshop.

The Applied Plastic and Reconstructive Surgical Skills workshop was run in partnership with the University of Tasmania. The training focused on practical surgery principles and concepts that will be easily applied in the trainees' home countries.

The workshop was co-convened by Interplast volunteer plastic surgeons Simon Thomson (Hobart) and Mike Klaassen (Auckland), and also included teaching from other Interplast volunteer surgeons.

Interplast volunteer plastic surgeon Dr Frank Kimble, from Tasmania, said the training courses were very important for his Pacific colleagues.



Dr Frank Kimble leads Pacific surgeons through a training exercise.

While in Hobart, our Pacific trainees and volunteer surgical faculty attended a wonderful function hosted by our key corporate partner, Avant Mutual, which was also attended by other Hobart-based volunteers and Rotarians. The week before, Avant also hosted an Interplast event in Sydney, attended by volunteers, Rotarians and corporate supporters. At both events Interplast staff and volunteers shared about the good work that has been happening throughout the Asia Pacific. At the Hobart event, guests were treated to an impromptu song from our Pacific guests. Avant has been a proud supporter of Interplast since 2009.



Dr Dyxon Hansell from Samoa learning plastic surgery techniques in Hobart. Photos: Woodrow Wilson

"The surgeons that come work in very challenging situations where they are required to have great skills to repair defects because they don't have plastic surgeons that they can easily refer cases to," he said.

"One day they will be able to teach their junior staff how to do these operations. It's a gift that keeps on giving, so I would certainly like to see these courses continue."

The course was the fourth in a series of workshops; the first two were hosted by the University of Tasmania in 2013 and 2014, and the third took place in April 2016 at Tupua Tamasese Hospital in Apia, Samoa.

General surgeon Dr Dyxon Hansell, who has participated in previous workshops, travelled to Hobart from Samoa.

"I've been involved with plastics for almost 10 years now. I've been privileged and honoured to be part of this journey," he said.

"We are extremely grateful, not only to our facilitators, but most importantly to those who make it possible for us to come here – Interplast, Rotary, the various sponsors who are too numerous to name; one can only be grateful and thankful. There are not enough words in the English language to thank people."

The trainees came from Fiji, Solomon Islands, PNG, Vanuatu, Tonga and Samoa.

**The workshop was made possible with funding from Rotary District 9780. It was the first time that Rotary has funded such a large program that took place in Australia.**



Trainees, faculty and Interplast staff who attended the Hobart workshop.



Interplast volunteer anaesthetist Dr Ian Hogarth prepares young Jemexen for major surgery on large burn scars on his right foot. Jemexen had not attended school to this point because he couldn't walk very far due to the injury.

## CHANGING LIVES IN REMOTE PNG

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three surgical programs a year to different locations in PNG.

Many of the patients were in their teens or early 20s; the lack of medical services meant they had lived with their conditions since childhood. These included cleft lip and palate, scarring from burns, hand injuries and tumours.

"The sheer enormity of the workload here cannot be overestimated," said Professor Ashton. "Many patients presented with burn scarring that were on the extreme end of deformity. A lot of these scars had been present for more than 10 years and were severely restricting the patient's quality of life."

Alongside the surgical training, mentoring was also provided to local anaesthetists

and nurses. A total of nine local medical practitioners participated in targeted and tailored training through the program.

"The surgical ward rapidly grasped the new concepts of plastic surgical nursing and were implementing them by the end of our visit," said Professor Ashton. "Similarly, the theatre staff, anaesthetic technicians and medical team quickly incorporated the new techniques into their repertoire."

Without support from PanAust, this program would not have been possible. We are extremely grateful for this ongoing partnership, and we are looking forward to continuing this work in PNG with PanAust to deliver much-needed surgical and training programs.

**You can find out more about one of the patients, Lemek, on the back of the donation form.**



## AUSTRALIA DAY HONOURS FOR INTERPLAST VOLUNTEERS

Two of our long-term volunteer surgeons were recognised in the recent Australia Day honours.

Mr James Savundra was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM). James is based in Perth. Since 2001 he has volunteered on 24 Interplast programs.

Associate Professor Peter Haertsch was



named a Member in the General Division of the Order of Australia (AM).

Peter is based in Sydney. Since 1987 he has volunteered on 46 Interplast programs.

Congratulations from all at Interplast to James and Peter for the recognition of your tireless service to people in Australia and around the world.

## TAKE ON THE NEW YORK MARATHON FOR INTERPLAST!

The New York Marathon is the largest in the world, and one of the hardest to get a place for. Last year more than 51,000 people took part – but almost as many missed out on a place.

You can skip the ballot, secure your entry to pound the streets of the Big Apple and support Interplast in November 2018 by registering for one of our five dedicated places.

This is an incredible opportunity to take part in one of the world's premier sporting events while raising money to change futures across the Asia Pacific through Interplast.

Contact Inspired Adventures for more information and to secure your spot now.

Email: [info@inspiredadventures.com.au](mailto:info@inspiredadventures.com.au)  
Call: 1300 905 188



## VALE PHYLLIS BELL

In late December, long-term Interplast staff member Phyllis Bell lost her long battle with cancer.

Phyllis spent more than three decades as a plastic surgery theatre nurse before joining Interplast as Equipment and Supplies Assistant, a role that she held for more than 10 years until August 2017. Her experience, vast knowledge of plastic surgery and relationship with many surgeons in Melbourne, and her warm and friendly personality made her an invaluable team member.

Phyllis also served on four Interplast programs as a volunteer theatre nurse, three to Samoa and one to Bangladesh.

Phyllis was farewelled at a service in Ivanhoe, Melbourne, in early January that was attended by Interplast volunteer surgeons, anaesthetists and nurses, along with Interplast staff.

She is survived by her husband, daughter and five grandchildren.

# NURTURING SURGICAL SKILLS IN MONGOLIA



Dr MacGill presents a Braithwaite skin graft knife to Dr Chuka. The knife was generously donated by Rotary District 9455.



Dr MacGill mentors Dr Chuka in the operating theatre with local staff observing.



Local patient Temuulen in the recovery ward after successful surgery on the burns on her hand.



Dr Chuka holding the knife.

**In Mongolia, a staggering one in four children sustain burn injuries, but despite the huge numbers of patients, the country has very few surgeons with the necessary skills and experience.**

We are helping to fill that gap by sending volunteer teams to train local surgeons, along with anaesthetists, nurses and hand therapists.

In August 2017, an Interplast volunteer team spent a week at the Khovsgol United Hospital in Murun in the remote north of the country, where they worked with local surgeons to operate on mostly young people with burns injuries. This was the second time an Interplast team had visited Murun to mentor their Mongolian colleagues.

The team included Interplast's volunteer Country Coordinator for Mongolia and anaesthetist David Pescod, theatre nurse Rebecca Scott, ward nurse Angela Doherty and plastic and reconstructive surgeon Kirstie MacGill.

The mentoring provided by the Interplast team is crucial. With no formal burns training available in Mongolia, all learning by local surgeons about burns happens on a brief rotation during their surgical training.

Kirstie taught the Mongolian surgeons in the operating theatre. Surgical techniques were demonstrated, and subsequently local staff then performed the operations supervised by the

Interplast volunteers.

The focus of the surgical training was senior surgeon Dr Chulunbat, aka Dr Chuka. The team first mentored Dr Chuka during the 2016 program to Murun and he then spent three months in Ulaanbaatar managing burns injuries at the Trauma Hospital. Dr Chuka was keen for the Interplast team to return to Murun and mentor him in the second stage of burns reconstruction operations. During the visit he was the lead surgeon for many of the cases with Kirstie providing instruction and support.

"I did lots of hands-on surgeries and procedures with Dr Kirstie," said Dr Chuka. "I am very thankful that Dr Kirstie and the team have helped me to develop skin reconstruction therapy here.

"I would like to thank Interplast for choosing our province to come and help our people.

"I want to encourage Australian people to help Interplast to do more programs like this to help our people and make life better for everyone."

**The 2017 Mongolia surgical mentoring program was made possible by a generous donation from our partner, Bright Blue, and it is part of Interplast's Australian NGO Cooperation Program, supported by the Australian Government.**



# RESTORING LEMEK'S DREAMS

Lemek has never been to school and has never had a job.

As a child, Lemek was severely burned in an accident at home. He is from a remote part of Papua New Guinea where even basic treatment is unavailable.

As the untreated wounds healed, the scars on his hands and neck hardened and tightened. His chin was fused to his neck, and both hands were severely contorted.

Lemek, now 25, has been waiting for many years for someone to help. Last year a visiting Interplast team operated on Lemek twice over a week to release the scars on his neck and repair his right hand.

Almost immediately, Lemek gained significant movement in his neck and arm. He will now be more independent but Lemek still needs surgery to repair his left hand.

Our teams still have plenty of work to do.

You can be part of changing futures for people like Lemek. Please make a donation today.



*Main Image: Interplast volunteer plastic surgeon Russell Corlett examines Lemek on an assessment trip in 2016  
Above: Lemek's left hand, which still requires major surgery.  
Photos: Dylan Evans and Woodrow Wilson*

## DONATE NOW

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**YES, I WANT TO  
HELP CHANGE FUTURES  
FOR PEOPLE LIKE LEMEK**

*Lemek with his brother after both rounds of surgery in late 2017.*

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

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

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