

Sri Lankan observers at the  
Victorian Adult Burns Services at  
The Alfred Hospital



**Interplast**<sup>®</sup>

# **INTERPLAST IN SRI LANKA 2016-2020 EVALUATION SUMMARY**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Interplast delivered its first program in Sri Lanka in 2001, following a needs assessment that recommended it commence a program which would focus on support to building local capacity in plastic and reconstructive surgery.

The program initially focused on establishing plastic and reconstructive surgery training and education at the National Hospital of Sri Lanka, and rural general plastic reconstructive surgery service activities in Batticaloa and Galle. Following a period of conflict in Sri Lanka, Interplast paused the program, which it resumed in 2009.

Interplast's Country Strategy Program Vision 2019-2021 is that:

Sri Lanka has access to a sustainable, locally driven plastic and reconstructive surgery service, providing quality surgical and related edical outcomes to those requiring them.

Subject to available funding, Interplast delivers four programs each year. The exception to this has been 2020, as global travel restrictions resulting from COVID-19 have also forced a pause in all of Interplast's in-country programs. Interplast is providing remote support to Sri Lanka during this time. Once travel restrictions have eased, Interplast expects it will resume programs similar to its pre-Covid model.





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## Country context

Interplast programs have been delivered in a context of ongoing progress in development and economic indicators by Sri Lanka.

The UN recognised Sri Lanka's post conflict development achievements, ranking it as being high among human development outcomes and moving toward being a sustainable and resilient society. A lowering of the rate of poverty to 4.1% in 2016, and a per capita GDP rate of USD4,066 in 2017, put Sri Lanka on track to achieving upper middle-income status. Within this progress, pockets of poverty and exclusion based on geography, ethnicity and religion, persisted, with the vast majority of Sri Lanka's poor residing in rural areas.<sup>1</sup> However, poverty is an increasingly urban phenomenon, with the bottom 40% living in cities.<sup>2</sup> At 2018, Sri Lanka's unemployment rate remained below 5% for previous seven years. Free education has contributed to high levels of youth literacy (98.7%), and health policies have resulted in an increased life expectancy (75 years).<sup>3</sup>

Sri Lanka has made remarkable achievements in progressing toward the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the Sustainable Development Goals. Its progress prompted the World Health Organization to cite Sri Lanka as a model for the South East Asian region. Sri Lanka's notable improvements against health indicators, progress in eliminating malaria, and declining rates of child and maternal mortality, all signalled what could be achieved by a well-functioning public healthcare system. Despite the progress, challenges remain; Sri Lanka achieved a 60% reduction in the rate of maternal mortality, falling short of the MDG target for a 75% reduction, with more needed to promote equitable and quality health care and services across the country for all newborns, children, adolescents, girls and women, and to ensure that gains are inclusive, so that no one is left behind.<sup>4</sup>

Over a number of decades, Sri Lanka's health system has contributed to improved health indicators, but it faces new challenges; an ageing population, changes in disease patterns, and a rise in the rate of non-communicable diseases.<sup>5</sup>

## Interplast's Sri Lanka program

The Sri Lanka program has focused on mentoring local surgeons in craniofacial, head and neck surgery; hand surgery for adult and paediatric patients; hand therapy mentoring to local therapists; and, in recent years, capacity building in burns management. In 2019, Interplast funded a burns needs assessment conducted at the National Hospital. Interplast has also facilitated local staff to attend conferences, and training in Australia with one surgeon undertaking a 12-month craniofacial fellowship at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne.

Between 2001 and 2020, Interplast volunteers delivered 55 program activities: undertaking 2,069 patient consultations and 856 surgical procedures, alongside their counterparts. Initially programs focused on providing plastic and reconstructive surgical services; however, as the skills of local surgeons grew, Interplast shifted its focus to capacity building, mentoring and training programs. Interplast has been running a craniofacial mentoring program and hand surgery mentoring program in Sri Lanka for more than a decade, and head and neck surgical mentoring program since 2015 and at the same time has provided surgical services. During the period of this review (2016-17 to 2019-20), Interplast volunteers conducted nine in-country programs; and in addition to patient consultations (232 for the period) and surgical procedures (94), they also delivered 42 allied health treatments; and provided 389 training opportunities.

## Program review 2001-2017

In 2017, Interplast reviewed its Sri Lanka program, for the period 2001-2017. The review identified improvements in the health sector and health indicators, but that challenges remained. Patients experienced long waiting periods in accessing the public hospital system, and differences in access to health care between rural and urban locations persisted. Although there had been improvements in the number of qualified plastic and reconstructive surgeons, it was insufficient to meet the needs of the population.

The review found that supporting training based at the National Hospital had built local capacity in plastic surgery and allied health, and was cost-effective. It recommended that the surgical and allied health mentoring program should continue, and that it could incorporate new areas of mentoring based on needs identified by local partners. It also recommended supporting Sri Lankan surgeons to become regional leaders in plastic and reconstructive surgery and support the development of a regional training hub based in Sri Lanka.



Local surgical team with Interplast surgeons during Interplast Head and Neck Surgical Mentoring Program.



Sri Lankan observers at the Victorian Adult Burns Services at The Alfred Hospital

## Sri Lanka Country Program Review 2016 to 2020

The purpose of this review is to examine the impact of Interplast's program from 2016-2017 to 2019-2020, and to communicate the results of Interplast's program activities in Sri Lanka to key stakeholders. Its broad objectives are to identify the impact and outcomes of the Sri Lanka country program, and assess the extent to which Interplast is achieving its vision for Sri Lanka. The findings will contribute to the development of relevant, effective and sustainable Interplast program activities in Sri Lanka.

### Findings

The review is informed by an analysis of program reporting, and by key stakeholders; the volunteers, patients, and national counterparts. Interplast's program staff and senior managers have given an organisational and governance perspective of Interplast's oversight of its programs, while a representative of its Board of Directors and Clinical Governance Committee discussed governance. These insights give Interplast a picture of where the program been most effective, what the challenges have been and where it could invest its efforts in the future.

Although the scope of this review is from the 2016-2017 program year to the present, achievements in Sri Lanka are built on the commitment and efforts of previous programs by volunteers and counterparts alike. Interplast volunteers have contributed to improved capacity in plastic and reconstructive surgery, supporting craniofacial; hand, head and neck surgery and hand therapy through surgery and teaching to help develop capability; on-the-job training and mentoring; surgery and allied health treatments; on ward rounds with one-on-one training; formal lectures and workshops. Interplast has facilitated attendance for Sri Lankan surgeons at conferences; such as the Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons, Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, and the Australian and New Zealand Burns Association. In March 2019, three Sri Lankan health professionals completed observerships in Australia, including two surgeons and one nurse.

In recent years, the program has been working towards improved capacity in burns management, and in May 2018, Interplast assisted Dr Gayan Ekanayake to attend the Emergency Management of Severe Burns regional training for surgeons in Nepal. Following this, Dr Ekanayake implemented local training for nursing staff to build capacity in burns management and worked with the General Hospital of Kurunegala to develop the country's first regional burns unit. The 2019 burns needs assessment at the National Hospital undertaken

by Professor JE Greenwood has helped inform and strengthen burn care management in Sri Lanka. One of the key elements of the success of the program has been the continuity of volunteer teams; the men and women who have delivered multiple visits and who have developed sound working relationships with their counterparts. There has been no better indicator of the importance of these relationships than during the COVID-19 global pandemic, which forced a shift from an in-country program to a virtual one. The success of this shift is largely due to enduring collegiate partnerships that volunteers and their counterparts have developed over the years of the program in addition to well-developed relationships between Interplast staff and local partners. This has manifested in not only the success of the online mentoring and training program, but also to one-on-one discussions of complex cases that counterparts are treating.

While these relationships have helped to maintain the momentum of the surgical and allied health program, more needs to be done in relation to nursing counterparts. The mentoring and professional development of nurses is an area for Interplast to consider investing more effort in the future. Nurses interviewed in-country gave a clear picture of where they see the training needs of their profession, and how Interplast might contribute to meeting those needs.

Effecting change in workplace culture and modelling how an effective team works is an area where Interplast is achieving lasting change. Volunteer teams have demonstrated that each team member has an important contribution to make, regardless of their profession and role in the team, and this has helped instil better practices and procedures to improve patient safety.

While Interplast has had a long and successful partnership with the National Hospital, in all areas of the program (surgical, anaesthetics, nursing, allied health) volunteers and counterparts agreed that there is much to be done outside of Sri Lanka's capital. Regional hospitals and facilities would benefit from mentoring through surgical and allied health services.

Gender equality and disability inclusion is an area that Interplast has recognised needs addressing, and it is currently investing significant resources to better understand barriers in all of its country programs, so that it can develop a targeted strategy to address these barriers.

The Sri Lanka program has matured to the point where Interplast has an opportunity to think about its future direction in the medium to long term. There may be scope to rethink the focus on craniofacial, hand, head and neck surgery and move toward a focus on burns. In supporting the work being undertaken by Dr Ekanayake and his colleagues for improved burns treatment and for a prevention strategy, Interplast could potentially utilise its expertise to influence at a national level. The foundational assessment undertaken by Interplast has assisted Dr Ekanayake in his ambition for a burns strategy for Sri Lanka.

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## Achieving the program vision, goal and objectives

### Vision

Sri Lanka has access to a sustainable, locally driven plastic and reconstructive surgery service, providing quality surgical and related medical outcomes to those requiring them.  
(Country Strategy, Sri Lanka 2019-2021)

The program goal for 2019-2021 is:

*To contribute to improving quality access to plastic and reconstructive surgery and related medical services in Sri Lanka for the most marginalised and vulnerable individuals.*

The specific program objectives focus on:

- improved plastic and reconstructive surgical and anaesthetic skills
- improved nursing skills, including pre- and post-operative care
- improved allied health services, in particular in relation to hand therapy
- an improved 'whole of team' approach to surgical outcomes.

Based on the perspective of counterparts and volunteers, this review has found that Interplast's program has made a significant contribution to the vision of a local, sustainable plastic and reconstructive surgery service. Progress has been steady throughout the 20 years of the program. Counterparts and volunteers alike have commented on the marked improvement in the skills of Sri Lankan medical professionals; and on the increased numbers of qualified plastic and reconstructive surgeons. Interplast's Annual Country Program Plan 2019-2021 documents these improvements. Local teams are treating increasingly complex cases, and doing so competently.

When Interplast's program commenced in 2001, Sri Lanka had just three fully qualified plastic and reconstructive surgeons. Counterparts report that there are now 20, and although the country has fewer plastic and reconstructive surgeons than is sufficient for its population of 20 million people, it is steadily getting closer to its own sustainable and locally driven surgical service. This is particularly true for the capital, Colombo, as these surgeons are based at the National Hospital. The next step in advancing this vision is for access to be extended beyond the capital and into regional areas, giving those in outlying areas a similar level of access to their city counterparts. Access to plastic and reconstructive surgical services, and with accompanying therapy, is much lower in the regions outside of the capital, and is an area where Interplast could explore in future programs.

Consistent with the findings of this review, the Country Program Plan highlights the need to do more to improve post-operative nursing care, hand therapy and burns rehabilitation. The latter, identified by local surgeon Dr Ekanayake and his colleagues, was apparent following the April 2019 terrorist attacks, when the National Hospital was inundated with patients who had sustained burns following the explosions. Dr Ekanayake has implemented local training for nursing staff to build capacity in the emergency management of burns.

The Country Program Plan has also highlighted areas for new opportunities, such as the possibility of entering into a formal memorandum of understanding with Sri Lanka's Ministry of Health. Interplast has commenced these discussions and a process is underway. Interplast has also supported the National Hospital in its request to the Ministry of Health for a full-time craniofacial service in Sri Lanka, to meet increasing demand and to ensure clinical safety for patients who are undergoing complex surgery.

## Recommendations

### Ongoing Program Delivery

- 1.** Interplast and partners to consider the current clinical focus of the program, to ascertain the surgical/subspecialty areas of greatest need:
    - potentially undertake a needs assessment of current clinical and training priorities
    - ascertain if the current focus on craniofacial, head and neck, hand surgery and hand therapy should be extended to include a focus on burns or other emerging areas of clinical need. (Interplast/partners)
  - 2.** Interplast to consider the optimal timing for allied health visits as part of future programs:
    - allied health volunteers potentially arrive at the end of a surgical program to allow for effective post-surgical treatment and timely follow-up for patients. (Interplast/partners/Country Coordinators/allied health partners)
  - 3.** To ensure continuity in program implementation, Interplast to consider and establish a plan for how it can best manage changes in key roles such as Country Coordinators and local champions. (Interplast/partners/Country Coordinators)
  - 4.** To maximise the impact of the individual surgical mentoring visits, consider the following restructure (or similar) to the current format. A seven-to-eight-day visit commencing on a weekend to enable:
    - pre-screening clinic on a Sunday
    - surgery schedule from Monday to midday Friday
    - postgraduate teaching on Friday afternoon
    - post-operative reviews of all patients. (Interplast/volunteers and counterparts)
  - 5.** To inspire more women in Sri Lanka to specialise in plastic and reconstructive surgery, Interplast to consider including volunteer women surgeons on its teams when possible. (Interplast/partners)
  - 6.** To help overcome communication challenges within the allied health program, explore the feasibility of having an interpreter available for each visit; and a single, consistent, in-country contact. (Interplast/partners/allied health partners)
  - 7.** Work with partners to advocate to the Ministry of Health, senior hospital administration and senior surgical staff to continue working toward the establishment of a national craniofacial unit, as part of the local Plastic Surgery Unit at the National Hospital.
    - This should include support for anaesthetic capacity of the craniofacial unit to ensure optimal care for paediatric craniofacial patients. (Interplast/partners)
  - 8.** To ensure appropriate post-operative care, and to encourage ownership of craniofacial cases by the local plastic surgical team, in consultation with partners, plan for at least one senior registrar to attend the craniofacial list. (Interplast/partners)
  - 9.** Liaise with local partners ahead of each visit to ensure that the standard and availability of equipment locally is adequate to meet the clinical and mentoring needs of each visit. Where equipment is below acceptable standards, Interplast to consider providing volunteer teams with equipment to be taken on in-country programs. (Interplast/partners)
  - 10.** Review the volunteer team make-up of each visiting clinical mentoring team prior to mobilisation to ensure that the correct volunteer cohort (professions, sub-specialties, experience) is identified to meet local safety challenges. This would include:
    - discussions with local partners to identify local challenges which may be presenting at that time, which could be addressed with a modification to the visiting team
    - planning to ensure that at least one nursing volunteer is included on surgical mentoring programs to support building of nursing capacity. (Interplast/partners)
- ### Clinical Education and Skills Development
- 11.** Help address allied health worker skills and the profile of therapy with targeted training, information and advocacy, with a focus on practical sessions. Areas include:
    - training in advanced therapy techniques for patients who have undergone complex surgery, using practical training to incorporate skills into therapy practice
    - targeted information for doctors and surgeons to boost the profile of therapy in patient care. (Interplast/partners)
  - 12.** Explore the potential for webinars, up to date educational material and mentoring to upgrade knowledge and skills in surgical, nursing, anaesthetic and allied health practice. (Interplast/partners)
  - 13.** Work with counterpart anaesthetists to provide advocacy for the role that anaesthesia as a specialist area has in patient safety. Useful topics that Interplast could help present or organise include:
    - regional blocks, haemodynamic monitoring, and airway management. (Interplast/anaesthetist partners)

**14.** To improve patient care, and skills development for medical professionals in regional areas, work with partners to identify opportunities to extend Interplast's mentoring and surgical/nursing/anaesthetic/allied health training program to hospitals outside of the major centres.

- consider using remote and online access to training, workshops and seminars for those in regional areas. (Interplast/partners)

**15.** Consider building a library on topics relevant to nursing (video, written material) and on equipment training, to extend the information available to nurses, particularly for those who cannot attend face to face training due to time constraints or location. (Interplast/nursing partners)

**16.** Encourage local partners to include in the program for the annual allied health conference the opportunity for practical demonstrations and supervised practice. (Interplast/allied health partners)

**17.** Provide training for therapists in the assessment and management of Obstetric Brachial Plexus Palsy. (Interplast/allied health partners)

**18.** Build into each visit an ongoing education program for all ward and medical staff, through workshops in post-operative care and resuscitation, particularly for paediatric patients, but also for adults. (Interplast/partners)

**19.** Support local allied health staff to develop a set of locally developed material covering protocols, assessment forms and educational material for therapists to use in their practice and for patient education. (Interplast/allied health partners)

**20.** Work with nurses to scope their training needs and identify:

- interpersonal skills requirements to boost confidence in interactions with doctors, colleagues, and patients and their families
- skills gaps in new and emerging surgical techniques and equipment
- a targeted mentoring program to address in-theatre skills for nurses
- the possibility and scope of facilitating overseas placements and scholarships. (Interplast/nursing)

**21.** To acknowledge the contribution and expertise of counterparts in sustainability of the mentoring and capacity building program, Interplast and partners explore ways of giving recognition to counterparts, so that clinicians are recognised as:

- resource partners who are contributing to the professional development of peers in South Asia.
- presenters and participants in online networks, webinars, and conferences, so that clinicians are highlighted as key trainers in their area of expertise. (Partners/Interplast/other Interplast South Asia program partners)

**22.** Interplast to explore the feasibility of an overseas exchange program for Sri Lankan surgeons to refine their training and skills. (Interplast/surgical partners)

### **Strengthening partnerships**

**23.** Interplast to build stronger relationships with Sri Lanka's Ministry of Health, to give the program better visibility, and to support local partners to advocate for national support and resourcing for key clinical areas (such as craniofacial surgery and post-surgical rehabilitation). As required, engage the advocacy of the Australian High Commission in Sri Lanka to assist with brokering meetings between Interplast, representatives of the National Hospital, and the Ministry of Health. (Interplast/the Australian High Commission/National Hospital)

**24.** Interplast to strengthen its current engagement with Sri Lanka's Ministry of Health to advance a formal memorandum of understanding to help guide and manage the program in a more systemic way. (Interplast/partners/Ministry of Health/Australian High Commission)

### **New programming activities to consider**

**25.** To capitalise on the success of surgical training in Sri Lanka and the region, explore the feasibility of supporting the establishment of a regional training centre of excellence in Sri Lanka.

- Basing a centre in Colombo would allow Sri Lankan plastic and reconstructive surgeons to train others in the region. (Interplast/partners/training organisations)

**26.** To assist with sustainability of programs within the region, Interplast and partners consider the potential for setting up a local presence.

- This could entail establishing a position to manage a part-time office, to help administer programs and to be a consistent point of contact between Interplast and partners. (Interplast Board and management/partners within the region)

**27.** Work with partners to ascertain patient needs for post-surgical mental healthcare and explore the feasibility for implementing an assessment and referral system on discharge. (Interplast/partners)

**28.** To give the allied health program greater reach, Interplast and local partners to scope the benefits of, and potential for, a dedicated allied health training program to be delivered at/in conjunction with local therapy schools. (Interplast/therapy training institutions/allied health partners) To mitigate risks associated with anaesthesia, deliver training for local clinical teams (including surgeons, anaesthetists and nurses) which focus specifically on patient safety procedures to embed these in clinical practice and workplace culture. (Interplast/partners)

**29.** Investigate opportunities for therapists at the Army Hospital to attend future training programs.

## Patients and families

Dr Fernando interviewed 12 patients, seven females and five males, between the ages of three and 57 years. Young patients were interviewed in the presence of a parent or guardian. Patient interviews took place at the National Hospital, Colombo, and were conducted in accordance with Interplast's Privacy Policy and Child Protection Policy and Interplast's Case Study and Photography Guidelines. Of the patients interviewed, seven had surgery performed by both local surgeons and by Interplast volunteer surgeons, and four were operated on only by Interplast volunteers. One patient was operated on by local surgeons, and has been assessed by Interplast and is waiting for his surgery when Interplast's in-country program resumes. Without exception, each patient and family member felt that their lives had improved by the treatment that they received from Interplast.

For some, the restoration of function has had life changing results; allowing them to participate in their communities, return to work, and for younger patients, giving them a far greater chance of going to school, socialising with their peers, and to fully participate in other aspects of their young lives. Parents were extremely grateful for treatment which had improved the lives of their children, giving them the prospect of a normal life now and into the future. For some, the change in their child following treatment meant that they could take up or resume working outside of the home as a result of the independence that treatment had given their child; while others were able to devote more time to caring for other children or family members needing care. Interplast would like to thank these patients and their families for the efforts they have made in sharing their experiences for this review.



Team discussion in operating theatre during Interplast Craniofacial Surgical Mentoring Program

## PATIENT 1

### 15-year-old girl

This young girl came to the interview with her mother, making the two-hour round trip to the National Hospital in Colombo. She is currently studying for her Ordinary-Level examinations, and is keen to enrol in a biology stream for her higher studies, with the hope of joining a medical faculty and becoming a doctor.

She had surgery to remedy a congenital facial dysmorphism condition, which had required multiple reconstructive surgeries over a number of years. Her first surgery in 2011 was performed by local surgeons in Sri Lanka, followed by two more procedures in 2013 and 2016. In 2019 the Interplast team, volunteer surgeon Dr Charles Davis, assisted by a local surgeon, performed a successful eye socket and nasal reconstruction. Following the surgery, Dr Davis mentioned that when she turns 18, the young patient would need to undergo further surgery. This is something that she is looking forward to.

The young girl's family noted that there was significant improvement in her condition, that her confidence and self-esteem since having the surgeries continued to grow, and that she accepted that she requires further surgery. She is doing well at school, and is not subject to any stigma or negative behaviour, or made her feel different because of her condition. Her family also said that she was fortunate in having good friends, family, and community. She leads a normal life and goes to school with her friends, taking part in extra-curricular activities like other people her age. Her mother also said that she does things for herself and does not need any special attention, although she currently needs to wear spectacles to help with a loss of vision in one eye, stemming from her condition.

The young girl is hoping that the Interplast team will visit soon to complete her treatment, so she can focus on her academic pursuits. Her mother thanked the Interplast team and offered her blessings to them for helping her daughter. She noted that she heard about Interplast from another patient, and hopes that the team can do more programs like the one that helped her daughter to help people with similar conditions. She also felt that it was important for awareness programs to reach people living in peripheral areas like her family, so that Interplast could reach more people in need.

“ ALTHOUGH SHE HAS A LONG WAY TO GO...SHE KNOWS SHE'LL BE ALL RIGHT, THANKS TO THE VISITING AUSTRALIAN TEAM. (PATIENT'S MOTHER) ”



## PATIENT 2: 13-YEAR-OLD GIRL

The young patient had a congenital craniofacial cleft condition, which meant that her nose had three openings instead of two. Her first surgery to correct the problem was in 2011 when she was four years old, and was followed up by a second surgery. The doctor managing this young girl's condition was concerned about the complexity of the surgery and that, given her age and she was still growing, her face would continue to change and the condition could worsen. The doctor felt that any strong intervention could have an adverse effect. This prognosis left her parents without hope that their daughter's condition would ever improve, and so they ceased looking for solutions for her, thinking that nothing could change her condition.

The patient's parents were very badly affected and upset by this prognosis and were concerned at how hard their daughter's life would be living with this condition. She was already finding school very difficult due to bullying by peers which affected her ability to do well at school. This prompted her parents to look for solutions for their daughter, to improve her condition and her life. Fortunately, around this time, the young girl's grandmother saw a program on television featuring Dr Ekanayake, during which he mentioned the Interplast program. The family contacted Dr Ekanayake for an appointment, at which he referred the young girl to his clinic at the National Hospital. In 2016, and not long after this initial appointment, the family was contacted to see the visiting Interplast team. Although they were given a date for surgery, it did not go ahead due to the sheer demands on the team from the numbers of patients requiring surgery at that time. Although disappointed, the family was reassured that their daughter would be treated during the next Interplast visit. The patient's mother said that although she was disappointed, and wanted the surgery for her daughter, she understood that other patients had conditions worse than her daughter.

When the Interplast volunteer team returned in 2017, they performed a successful were able to successfully perform an open rhinoplasty with alar correction surgery on the young girl, then aged ten. Interplast's volunteer surgeon, Dr Charles Davis, was assisted in the surgery by two local doctors. This was an emotional and important time for the young patient and her family, and on the day following the surgery and the bandages were removed, the young patient said to her mother; 'those children won't make fun of me now', which caused her mother to cry. Everyone involved was delighted and excited following the successful outcome of the surgery, and the young girl herself was overjoyed, showing everyone her normal nose.

Although the surgery was very successful, doctors advised that as she grows, the young patient will require further surgery, as her face will change the older she gets. The young girl had begun to experience negative attention again as she grew and her nose looked different to others, but her and her family were not as concerned as before as they knew it would be corrected with further surgery.

The family would like to thank the Interplast team for all it does for all patients under their care, and for lifting the huge emotional burden they had all felt. The patient's mother believes that there is a need for an education campaign, especially for people in regional areas who do not normally have access to resources, so that they too can benefit from Interplast. She had referred people to Dr Ekanayake, and some had been placed on the Interplast program and are awaiting treatment. She also felt that longer visits by Interplast could make the program even more successful and treat more people, which would have a positive impact on Sri Lanka. Many people experience negative mental health as a result of their conditions, and she believed that there would be benefit in mental healthcare as part of the program so that patients on discharge would have a chance of a better recovery.

**“ THANKS TO THE SURGERY, OUR LIVES HAVE CHANGED SO MUCH. ”**

**(PATIENT'S MOTHER, WHO WANTED TO PASS A MESSAGE OF THANKS FOR THE GIFT THAT INTERPLAST AND SRI LANKAN SURGEONS HAVE GIVEN THE FAMILY)**



### PATIENT 3: FIVE-YEAR-OLD GIRL

This young patient was treated by Interplast volunteer surgeons for brachial plexus palsy in her right hand. The family had a 140km journey by public bus to attend a clinic at the National Hospital, where they were interviewed. The mother brought her daughter to the clinic, leaving the young girl's two-year-old sibling in the care of her grandmother.

The condition caused by a birth injury meant that as a baby, the young girl could not move her right hand. Following her birth, her mother stopped working so that she could care for her daughter, who required additional support because of her condition. This was a difficult decision and had put the family under financial strain, but the girl's mother said that they wanted to make sure that their daughter had the best care, and that they could help her with her physiotherapy program. The family hid her from friends and neighbours because of her condition.

As a baby, the young girl was treated at the Lady Ridgeway Hospital (the paediatric branch at the National Hospital) and at the age of four months she had her first surgery, performed by local doctors. For the first time she was able to lift her hand. Her mother explained:

*Till then her hand was just a deadlimb...It was hard to lift her because her hand would just fall down.*

At the age of two, the little girl underwent a second surgery-a tendon transfer surgery-which was done by the Interplast volunteer surgical team. Her mother noticed further improvements to her condition following the second surgery. She now does her exercises and has regular follow-up appointments, helping with function of her right hand, whereas previously she could only use her left hand.

Her mother noted that she was now becoming more independent, doing things for herself, helping around the house and looking after her younger sister. Her family is not as worried for her future as they were before her treatment. Now that she needs less attention, her mother hopes to begin working, perhaps starting a small business in a few years' time.

The family thanked Interplast and sent their blessings to the volunteer team, and to all of the doctors for the help that their daughter has received. They expressed hope that the rest of her treatment plan could be completed as soon as possible. While they are very grateful, they also wish that other poor families in Sri Lanka could be helped as they have been.

**“ THERE ARE NO WORDS TO DESCRIBE HOW GRATEFUL I AM TO ALL THE DOCTORS WHO HELPED (MY DAUGHTER). I WISH THAT INTERPLAST COULD HELP ALL THE CHILDREN IN SRI LANKA WITH CONDITIONS LIKE THIS BECAUSE BEING A MOTHER WITH A CHILD AFFECTED BY THIS CONDITION, I KNOW WHAT THOSE PARENTS GO THROUGH EVERY DAY. (PATIENT'S MOTHER) ”**



## PATIENT 4: 57-YEAR-OLD MAN

This gentleman lives over two hours away from Colombo. He has is married with a family of two adult children, and runs his own grocery store. In November 2018 he developed a left side facial nerve palsy following complications from tympanoplasty surgery, a procedure to reconstruct the eardrum, which was undertaken to treat a chronic suppurative otitis media. Following the surgery, the left side of the patient's face started to droop, which affected his vision and caused his speech to become slurred. This was a particular difficulty as his customers found him hard to understand. The condition also affected his sleep and breathing. Doctors who had been treating him at the Plastic Surgery Clinic at the National Hospital referred him to the Interplast volunteer team.

In 2019 he had his first surgery, a facial reanimation with temporalis muscle to angle the mouth and a fascia lata graft. The Interplast team informed him that an additional surgery could improve the results. The patient reported that he feels better after the surgery, and that the facial paralysis has reduced, but is still present, as are the problems with vision in his left eye. Despite these residual issues, he is still able to work in his business.

This patient is keen to see the Interplast team return to Sri Lanka as soon as possible so that he can have the next surgery. He would like to see more patients have access to the Interplast program, as so many people, especially small children, would benefit greatly from plastic surgery to treat their conditions. He is very grateful for what Interplast has done for him and for people all over the country, and wished Australia a speedy recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic as well.



**“ I WISH THAT THE INTERPLAST TEAM COULD TREAT MORE PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY CHILDREN, SO THEY COULD BENEFIT FROM PLASTIC SURGERY TO TREAT THEIR CONDITIONS. ”**

## PATIENT 5: 11-YEAR-OLD GIRL

This young girl and her family live approximately 150km from Colombo. She is currently in grade six at school. From birth, it was clear that this young girl had one side of her head larger than the other, and over time she began to experience seizures. Tests eventually led to a diagnosis of neurofibromatosis, right facial and bone hypertrophy; and the left side of her brain was enlarged, a condition which could not be cured.

The condition has left her with an intellectual disability, so she requires additional support. There is no school for children with additional support needs where she lives, so she attends her local school in a class with other children of her age. Even though her disability impedes her ability to pass exams, she has friends at school, and she socialises like other children her age. Her mother takes care of her needs at home.

Her first surgery was performed when she was eight years old and was not a great success. In 2018, she saw Interplast volunteer surgeon, Dr Charles Davis who performed surgery on her face, dealing with the left side soft tissue lesion and a total parotidectomy and face lift. She recovered well and her family was informed that she would need further surgery.

Before the surgery with the Interplast team, the young girl suffered a lot of stigma due to her appearance, but since the surgery this has dissipated and she has gained greater acceptance, something for which she and her family are grateful. Although she still faces a number of challenges, her condition has improved, and she no longer has seizures. She has not yet been scheduled for follow-up surgery by Interplast, but her family reports that she is receiving good care from the local plastic surgery clinic. Her family wishes to thank Interplast and hopes that once the pandemic is over that Interplast volunteers can treat their daughter again.



## PATIENT 6: 57-YEAR-OLD WOMAN

This patient lives three hours from Colombo; she has two children, and worked in an audit firm. In February 2019, on her way to work she was struck by a motor vehicle and was hit on the right side of her face. Following emergency treatment at a local hospital, from where she was transferred to the National Hospital for further treatment, she underwent five surgeries to repair damage to her face, particularly around the eye region. Due to memory problems, she has also been referred to a neurological clinic.

Her fifth surgery was performed by an Interplast volunteer surgeon, which she says has improved her condition and facial appearance considerably. She thanked the volunteer team for their efforts in aiding her recovery. Before this surgery she had no prior knowledge of Interplast and was referred by Dr Gayan Ekanayake.

Despite her injuries, this patient is able to continue with household chores, and does not require constant care, allowing her family to continue working. She unfortunately lost her job following the accident, and the family has suffered financial hardship as her husband also lost his job due to COVID-19.



## PATIENT 7: 10-YEAR-OLD BOY

This young patient's condition was the result of a difficult birth during which he sustained a trauma injury to his left arm, which was later diagnosed as a brachial plexus injury. After attending a paediatric clinic, the young boy was referred to the National Hospital Plastic Surgery Clinic. At the clinic, the family met Dr Beneregama, who then referred their son to Interplast.

Following the first surgery in 2014, and a second, a radial capsulodesis of his left wrist in 2018, the young patient's condition improved, and he was able to raise his arm up to the shoulder, and move his hand medially and laterally. His next treatment will focus on improving control of his fingers.

The young patient has a physiotherapy exercise program to help his condition improve; although his father reports that he does not always comply with completing the exercises. His father has reported a marked improvement in his daily and school life thanks to surgery and post-operative management. The young boy no longer requires additional support, and is able to do most things a boy his age does; ride a bicycle independently and pull a wheelbarrow, and play with his younger sibling. Before the surgery he was isolated and did not mix well at school; now he is more confident and socialises with classmates, taking part in school activities. Thanks to his new-found confidence, has even been involved in a few fights at school!

The boy's father said that **it was unusual for a family of their socio-economic status to have access to the treatment and calibre of surgery that his son has had, and that he was grateful to Interplast for the opportunity.** His family is looking forward to the next Interplast visit for further management of the boy's condition.



## PATIENT 8: NINE-YEAR-OLD GIRL

This young girl is in 4th grade at school, and lives 150km from Colombo. Her condition is the result of a difficult birth, during which she sustained an obstetrical brachial plexus injury. Prescribed only exercise to treat the condition, the family saw no improvement in her affected arm so sought additional medical attention. After continuing follow-up treatment over six months, a doctor referred the little girl to Interplast.

In June 2018, the Interplast team saw the young girl, and a volunteer surgeon performed a successful brachial plexus repair by tendon transfer. Her family saw a significant improvement in their daughter's condition. Although she still faces some discomfort in lifting her arm and moving her fingers, her father said that she is much more active now. She is keen to follow her treatment with her occupational therapist and is noticing improvements; such as being able to hold objects and perform most of her daily activities independently. She is also doing well at school, which is a relief to her parents, and she has expressed a keen interest in studying science, aspiring to becoming a doctor one day.

As the young girl's condition has improved so that she no longer requires constant care, her mother hopes to return to work once her younger son enters school. Her father mentioned that they knew of another family whose child had been successfully treated by Interplast volunteers, and that they, too, were grateful for the help they had received. He felt that more information could be given about the Interplast program so that people with similar conditions to his daughter could be helped. The young girl and her family were hoping that Interplast could return soon to continue her treatment.



## PATIENT 9: 15-YEAR-OLD MALE

*I am willing to give the surgery another chance.*

The young man is currently attending Grade 10, and is preparing for his examinations. At birth he was diagnosed with Treacher Collins syndrome, a genetic disorder resulting in facial deformity. He has undergone three surgeries conducted by local surgeons, facial reconstruction, implant and implant removal; the first being at age three. His experience with surgery has not always been successful, and he had ceased his regular clinic visits. Local surgeons informed him of the Interplast program and the possibility that he could have plastic and reconstructive surgery when the team next visits.

During one of Interplast's last visits to Sri Lanka before the pandemic, he was assessed by the team and together they agreed on a treatment plan. Although his treatment has been put on hold, the young man and his family are hopeful that he can have surgery when Interplast teams are able to return to Sri Lanka. The young man's mother described the stigma the family endures because of her son's condition, but that this did not faze them. She said how proud she is of her son for being brave and hopes everyone will see past his appearance, appreciating him for his personality.



## PATIENT 11: 10-YEAR-OLD GIRL

The young girl is one of two children, with a 15-month-old sister. She is currently attending school and preparing for examinations. Due to complications at birth, she sustained a brachial plexus injury to her right arm, leaving her with a hyper-extended hand. Her mother was reassured that this would be resolved with regular follow-up treatment.

Despite the reassurances, the affected arm had very little function, and she received physiotherapy and a referral to the Plastic Surgery Unit at the National Hospital in Colombo.

At the age of three, the young girl underwent her first surgery, a tendon transfer undertaken by local surgeons, and at age six she underwent her second surgery, undertaken by the Interplast team.

These surgeries have given her the ability to move her right arm, but movement is still restricted, and she will require further surgery.

Until that happens, she is doing daily exercises and is making slow improvements to her movement. Her parents explained the difficulties in balancing the need to assist in her treatment regime at home with work commitments. She still needs help with daily living activities, and faced difficulties and when commencing schooling. Despite facing restrictions of movement as a very young child and when she commenced school, her mother commented that she is a very active and motivated child. She also explained how her daughter's condition has greatly improved since the time of surgery. The family wished to pass on their thanks to Interplast for all of the help they have given their daughter, and to Sri Lankan citizens by giving access to specialist surgery.



## PATIENT 12: THREE-YEAR-OLD BOY

The family of this young boy travelled a significant distance to attend a clinic at the National Hospital. They told their story of the young boy's condition and subsequent treatment. At birth, their son was diagnosed with polydactyly and syndactyly, and the infant was referred to the Lady Ridgeway Hospital for Children. Around the time of the birth the family also took their son to see local plastic surgeon Dr Beneragama. It was during that consultation that the family were first told about Interplast's program in Sri Lanka.

Interplast first saw this little boy when he was nine months old, and within three days of this first consultation he underwent surgery by the volunteer surgeons, who removed four fingers, and separated the fused fingers. In recent months, the final surgery that the boy needed was performed by local plastic surgeons, who removed the extra toes from his feet.

This young boy's mother described the impact of her son's condition, so significant that she delayed her intention to have more children until he could be treated. Now that her son's condition is resolved, she is hoping to have more children.

The family continue taking their son for regular post-surgical clinic visits, and with his physiotherapy regime. They feel a burden has been lifted from their lives and are grateful to Interplast and local surgeons for ensuring that their child can lead a normal life.

Coming to these clinics I've seen so many different abnormalities in children, and realise my son's condition wasn't as bad as most. These topics are taboo...and parents become isolated, not knowing what treatment is possible.



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THEY CAN LEAD HAPPY AND  
NORMAL LIVES.  
(BOY'S MOTHER)**

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## PATIENT 10: 25-YEAR-OLD MAN

Whilst undertaking his work as a journalist, the young man was involved in a traffic accident, resulting in serious injuries to his face, including multiple facial bone fractures, a fractured arm and crush injury to his leg, and the loss of an eye. At the time of the accident, he received emergency care followed by multiple surgeries to repair the injuries, including successful surgery to save his badly injured leg. Unfortunately, some surgeries were unsuccessful, leaving him with disfigurement to his face.

The trauma of surviving such a serious accident, and the experience of surgery which had failed to repair his facial injuries left him with depression. One medical professional encouraged him to see a local plastic surgeon, and she referred him to Interplast as a team of volunteer surgeons was due to visit in the coming months.

The young man saw the Interplast team in 2018, and underwent a successful facial reconstruction surgery. While he still requires further surgery, he felt happy with the results and how his condition was managed. Of his experience with Interplast and local surgeons, he said although the accident had impacted his life, he had always strived to remain positive throughout his treatments. Further treatment has been delayed due to Interplast teams delaying their visit in 2019, and more recently the global pandemic.

This young man would like to pass on his thanks to Interplast for all that has been done for him so far, and that he is very motivated to continue with his treatment.





Interplast Hand Therapy Conference held at the National Hospital of Sri Lanka



Interplast Clinic at National Hospital with local counterparts



Dr Gayan Ekanayake meeting with Interplast Staff, Thomas Loporto, at ANBZA Congress in Hobart



Beth McNeish with patient during Interplast Hand Therapy Mentoring Program



Dr David McCombe delivering clinic at Interplast Hand Surgery Mentoring



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