

Frequently Asked Questions about Interplast



This is a list of questions asked at District Conference Showcases or Rotary Club presentations. If you have another question that is not here, please don't hesitate to email Coordinator – Rotary Engagement, Janette Etherington, at janette.etherington@interplast.org.au.

What does Interplast do?

Interplast changes lives! We do this by providing free plastic and reconstructive surgeries, post-operative care, and allied health treatment to patients in developing nations across the Asia-Pacific region where this care is not accessible. Interplast currently has partnerships with 17 countries.

How does Interplast choose which countries it works in?

Interplast only works in countries where we are invited to do so. Interplast has MOUs in place with the Ministries of Health and the hospitals we partner with. We establish the need of the local clinicians, and provide the services they have requested.

Is Interplast a Rotary project?

Interplast was co-founded by a Rotarian and a surgeon in 1983. Rotarians, Clubs and Districts across Australia and New Zealand have continued the relationship ever since then. Interplast is now a Rotary-supported not-for-profit entity.

Does Interplast receive government funding?

Interplast receives some funding from the Australian Government, through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Where does Interplast's money come from?

About 30% comes from Rotarians, Clubs and Districts across Australia and New Zealand. The rest comes from individual donations, corporate donors, bequests, and various fundraising activities.

Does Interplast have paid staff?

Yes, we do. We need paid staff to ensure that we can be fully compliant with the requirements of the Australian Government and DFAT, in order to receive that funding.

Are Interplast and Rotary Oceania Medical Aid for Children (ROMAC) connected/the same organisation?

No, the organisations are completely separate.

Interplast's model is to send volunteers to our partner countries, and to train the local clinicians. Our patients are children and adults of any age.

[ROMAC](#) treats children under 16 years of age. ROMAC's model is to bring a child patient and their guardian/parent to Australia or New Zealand for treatment.

Interplast performs plastic and reconstructive surgery to restore function and enable the patient to live as full a life as possible. ROMAC provides life-giving and/or dignity-restoring surgery, with medical treatment not available in the patients' own countries.

Interplast has an MOU with ROMAC, so that if either organisation identifies a potential patient that the other is better suited to treat, a referral can be made to try to facilitate the necessary care for the patient.

How many patients has Interplast helped over the years?

As of April 2024, Interplast has treated over 27,000 patients across the Asia-Pacific.

How many clinicians has Interplast trained?

As of April 2024, Interplast has offered training to over 8,500 medical personnel. This includes in-person training and mentoring, as well as webinars and on-line training sessions. Our training is offered to surgeons, anaesthetists, and nurses, as well as allied health clinicians, such as speech therapists and physiotherapists.

Is Interplast just a fly-in, fly-out charity?

No – we believe in providing patient care where the patient has the support of their whole community, with every patient interaction also being a training opportunity for the local clinicians. We want to build sustainable health care in our partner countries. In an ideal world, we would do ourselves out of a job, because there would be no need for us to provide our services.

Why are so many of Interplast's patients treated for cleft lips and cleft palates?

Cleft lips and palates occur in babies born around the world. The difference between countries like Australia and New Zealand, and developing nations in the Asia-Pacific where Interplast works, is that in developed nations, babies born with a cleft lip receive surgery within weeks of their birth. Those born with a cleft palate receive surgery within the first year of life. These surgeries are not available to most of the population in the Asia-Pacific countries where Interplast works.

Why does Interplast treat so many patients for burns?

In developing nations, open fires are often used for heating and cooking. Gas and electricity are not available, or irregularly available, so wood, charcoal, or liquids such as oil, petrol or kerosene can be used. Open flames, liquid fuel and small children can be a disastrous combination.

There is little first aid knowledge in developing nations, and often no doctor or hospital within easy reach. Burns that are not treated appropriately cause severe contractures as they heal, resulting in physical incapacity and disfigurement for the patient.

What other conditions does Interplast treat?

Interplast's volunteers also provide treatment for tumours; traumatic injuries such as those caused by machete wounds and by motorbike accidents; diabetic amputees who have lost feet or lower limbs due to the disease.

Interplast's nurses work in the operating theatres and provide post-operative care for patients. Interplast also works with local physiotherapists and prosthetists to provide mobility aids such as prosthetic limbs, wheelchairs, and other mobility aids, and to train the patients in how to use them.

Does Interplast work with Operation Cleft?

[Operation Cleft](#) contracts the services of Bangladeshi plastic surgeons to provide surgery for patients with cleft lips and palates in Bangladesh.

Interplast won't duplicate services already provided in a partner country.

Can I volunteer to go on an Interplast program?

Interplast's clinical volunteers are all currently registered and practising medical professionals, resident in Australia or New Zealand. They use their annual leave or unpaid leave to take time away from their jobs to volunteer for Interplast. If you are interested in volunteering for Interplast, please email contactus@interplast.org.au.

How else can I volunteer for Interplast?

Interplast needs passionate Rotarians to promote Interplast's work to Rotarians and Rotary Clubs across Australia and New Zealand. If you would like to volunteer to be an Interplast Champion in your area, please email Janette Etherington, at janette.etherington@interplast.org.au.