

FREE PLASTIC SURGERY OPERATION CHANGES LIVES OF DISFIGURED CHILDREN

One hundred and sixteen disfigured indigent children under the age of twelve underwent surgery for cleft palates, cleft lip and burns. Others which were burn victims also were given needed restoration surgery which changed their lives forever. Thanks to Rotary International, Rotaplast (part of Rotary International), and the volunteer services of a group of sixteen medical personnel and nine volunteers from all over the United States and one surgeon from Guatemala. They joined together to venture to Southern India where they drew patients from a small, remote, and undeveloped village called Nagamangala. Many of the volunteers were seasoned veterans from previous missions similar to this one that took place from Aug 26th to Sept 10th 2006.

Rotaplast is a charitable organization comprised of Rotarians. Missions which provide curative, reconstructive surgeries are just one of the international service projects provided by Rotary Clubs.

Rotaplast sponsors each operation which costs approximately \$600.00 for each child. Rotary International sponsored fifteen missions this year with all medical staff donating their time. The Glendale Sunrise Rotary Club sent a member of its club, Ray Rangwala, to India with this group of volunteers to observe and record the works of these exceptional humanitarians and their triumphs. He also assisted with translating the language when language barriers arose. As the group photojournalist, he has many amazing pictures of the miracles performed on the children who have been ostracized and labeled "the untouchables" since birth due to their deformities.

Mr. Rangwala is a native of India who came to the United States to study 26 years ago. He said he is happy to have had the opportunity to do something for his country. One story told by Mr. Rangwala is what he describes as typical of the effect the disfigured children have on the lives of the families who have children born with cleft problems. One young mother with a three month old baby was willing to give up her child to improve her own life as her husband deserted her due to the shame felt by the deformity. Her pleas for surgery at first were denied due to the young age/weight of the baby. She felt that if their child had corrective surgery and the disfigurement was no longer present, her husband would return and they could be a family again. Her desperate situation did not go unheard for long by the medical staff that came for the purpose of changing lives.

The hospital in which the surgeries took place is the AIMS Medical College in the town of Bellur, in the state of Karnataka. Dr. Ann Delaney from Kaiser Permanente in San Rafael, CA was the chief surgeon and medical director for this life changing project. Long days starting at 6:30 in the morning and not ending until 9:30 at night did not detour them from their determination to serve as many children as possible. After a long day of surgery, an hour long medical meeting took place regarding the next day's surgery and patients. Just one of the hardships endured during the surgeries were the almost daily power outages. To remedy the problem, the villagers who were mostly farmers, had Biofuel electricity generation plant burned garbage to create the needed electricity.

During the surgeries medical students in an adjoining building were afforded the opportunity to view the surgeries live via video. A holy man named Sri Sri Sri Balagngadharnath Swamiji heads the nonprofit organization which operates the hospital. As part of this holy man's largess, he runs scores of schools and colleges which assist the poor in providing them with job skills and medical care. The volunteer group for this mission was provided with food,

transportation, the hospital facilities, interns, and hospital staff due to the Swamiji's generosity and enabled the Rotaplast humanitarians to fulfill their mission of creating smiles and joy out of despair.

When asked why these very busy people left their practices, homes and family to come to this country which still believes in the caste system, with its outdated superstitions, their response is we come here from "the goodness of our hearts and the skill in our hands to change the lives of children".

Mr. Rangwala will be speaking of his trip at the Glendale Sunrise Rotary meeting on October 27, 2006 at 7:00 a.m. at the Glendale Hilton located at 100 W. Glenoaks Blvd, Glendale, California.