

Notes on Interface Uganda Trip 2012
Vikram Devaraj Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeon

Vikram Devaraj visited Uganda for two weeks, between May 22nd and June 1st 2012, and stayed with Andrew and Sarah Hodges. Vikram writes:

Patients and Operations

“We held a clinic almost straight after landing. We saw a number of complex problems, including children with severe burns and resultant flexion contractures. One operation included a capsulectomy reducing a 90° flexion contracture of the elbow to around 20°. A medially based fasciocutaneous flap was used to resurface this defect together with split skin graft as the neurovascular structures were covered by the flap. The contracture followed chronic infection rather than a burn injury.

Our second operation was on an 8-year-old child with symphalangism in the right-hand. A subperioosteal approach was used, the bone divided and conchal cartilage graft from the ear inset in between the joint surfaces to produce 90° of flexion in a previously rigid and fully extended digit. Multiple Z plasties were performed on the radial border of the thumb together with full thickness skin graft.

A particularly complex case was a 12-year-old Somali girl who had a Volkmann ischaemic contracture. The plan was to harvest the gracilis muscle from her left thigh, and join the artery, vein and nerve of the muscle to appropriate vessels and nerves in her forearm. The anterior interosseous nerve was used as a motor. Incision was in the antecubital fossa extending to the elbow through previous injury. All scar tissue was excised down to the interosseous membrane to make space for the gracilis muscle. The long flexor tendons were joined together as a composite attachment/ the gracilis muscle was marked prior to division at 5 cm intervals to define the resting tension with the leg abducted. The muscle flap was fixed to the common flexor origin and the nerves repaired as short as possible. The veins were 0.4 mm in size. The arc of flexion between digits was very important and maintained.

Another procedure on a 10-year-old child, to release an electrical burn of the thumb, required a Foucher flap for cover and an axial k wire..

Andrew unfortunately pricked himself with a hollow needle whilst operating. The patient was a gardener who had crushed his finger on a gate post five days previously. Whilst Andrew was re-exploring the wound, which looked grey and inert, he pricked himself. The patient was HIV positive but didn't know it. Andrew had to start some anti-retro viral treatment that he has to stay on for four weeks. We have tried to contact the gardener, but have so far not been successful.

Examining

A significant part of the trip involved preparing and holding the Masters in Medicine examination. Andrew, George, Rose and I examined two candidates, Darius and Martin. The candidates had a number of sections to complete including OSCE stations (10), short answer questions, MCQ's and essay questions on the whole syllabus in hand surgery. I am pleased to say the candidates performed well and both passed successfully.

CoRSU

CoRSU is thriving and appears to be going from strength to strength. The case mix is also extending for plastic surgery with more challenging problems and opportunities for reconstruction. George Galiwango is now Head of Department. The ethos of providing free care for all children continues and those adults who cannot afford treatment are funded.

Social Activities

It was lovely to see the Hodges family again. We went to Sam's graduation from the International School Kampala, and had a pizza party with their new pizza oven built in the garden. We also had a delightful meal with Ingrid MacCormack.

Andrew and Sarah are building a new house on a plot of land in Fort Portal, a beautiful rural part of western Uganda, close to the mountains and next to a lake. Naomi is continuing to study at Bristol University. Having graduated from secondary school, Sam will be working in Turi School as a youth leader and mentor, and Rachel has at least another two years at the Turi School.

Sarah now has a permanent post as Head of the Anaesthetic Division at International Hospital Kampala. Andrew is investigating a project to use fish to generate solar power and reduce his energy bills even further – he is always looking for new projects to take on! He has been presenting in Nairobi and feels people are starting to wake up to the speech problems in patients with unrepaired palates. Andrew is also examining in Addis Ababa and involved with some work through CBM in Rwanda. He, Sarah and Martin recently visited Gahini hospital, in eastern Rwanda. He seems to be developing an interest in operating on renal and ovarian cancers, driven partly by need and circumstance.

Andrew has since reported that all the patients we looked after at CoRSU have done extremely well, particularly the 12-year-old Somali girl with the gracilis free functioning muscle transfer, who has healed beautifully.

The Hodges will be in UK this summer.”

Vikram S. Devaraj