



## Smiles Update - Christmas 2020



### Message from our Chair

Despite the on-going pandemic and its havoc caused across the Globe and its troubling effects on each one of us; I'm pleased to advise that our Surgeons are back and very busy operating across Bangladesh; bringing joy to deeply appreciative parents and a smile to the faces of many children. Bangladesh like other Asian and South Asian countries is hurting badly from the resurgence of the pandemic with thousands being infected every day and the nation's death toll continuing to rise sharply. Due to the initial widespread lockdown our surgery program was suspended for more than 4 months, resulting in a significant build up and backlog of untreated clefts, causing enormous anguish, worry and stress for families with cleft suffering children. Over the last 3 months Operation Cleft Australia working with our partner as Cleft Bangladesh, even with all the extra pressures caused by the virus has achieved an impressive 489 life changing surgeries.

Our program to support the less fortunate poor and needy families across Bangladesh has now completed 15 years of service, and has always been deeply appreciated, but since the Corona virus experience, this appreciation is even more deeply felt and expressed. A big thank you to our faithful, hardworking surgeons who have been willing to face the extra risks that Covid-19 virus has impacted upon them, but also on the Bangladesh health system and the hospitals' staff and patients. Without the extra initiatives taken by the Surgeons, the frustration, cost and stress experienced by the affected families would be extreme.

Thank you also to you our many faithful, regular Australian supporters who despite our own set of national and state challenges have continued to help provide the funds and support required to enable the free surgeries to occur, surgeries that bring hope and a new smile to so many children. It has been a tough and very different year for my own Rotary Club, and I'm sure for all Rotary Clubs around Australia, with so many of the usual productive fund-raising activities and events suspended. But the support from so many Clubs continues, for this we say thank you, without this support the program could not achieve what it has over 15 years. One of the rare positives coming out of this year has been the enjoyable opportunity for me to share the Operation Cleft story with so many Rotary Clubs and organisations through the social media platforms like Zoom. It has been a delight to meet you and enjoy these special times together. Your support continues to be so important for the on-going success of this program.

I wish you all a Very Happy Christmas and compliments of the season, and that the new year will be a much better one for all of us.

Chair, Bruce McEwen

## **Miracle for Ria's parents**



Ria Moni, a one-year baby girl, visited our camp with her mum and grandparents in Bogra in 2020 for her cleft/palate operations. They came from Dupchachia village of Bogra and it is around 200-kilometer distance from Dhaka. Her father, Sohel Rana, an expat works as a gardener in the Middle East and her mother, Shahina, is a housewife. The baby had both cleft lip and palate deformities and she had her lip corrected last February and her the palate surgery in September 2020. When the baby came to the centre, she was so cute and lively that she was attracting attention from the people around. Other parents who were carrying their babies with cleft and waiting with fear for surgery, received inspiration and felt calmer appeased seeing Ria Moni.

Shahina was a very young mum, “After Ria Moni’s birth, I experienced my world differently. During Ria’s birth my husband was in the Middle East and before her birth he would talk to me every day, sometimes more than twice.

After Ria Moni’s birth and when I shared the news with my husband that the baby had a cleft, my husband stopped communicating with me for one week, and he took the time to absorb the issue! I cannot describe my feelings during those days! But I did

have her grandparents as support. Still they are keeping supporting me...” Shahina shared.

Her grandparents assured her that it's not the parents' fault and God has gifted them the baby even with a cleft, and they need to try to take care of the baby as much as they can. Shahina would feel humiliated when people talk to her about the baby's cleft and sometimes tears trickled down from her eyes silently. She hoped that people would not say anything much about her baby's deformity from there on. Shahina's family did not have the financial capacity and therefore it was to become a burden for them to manage such a big amount of money for surgery. They are so grateful for the support from the Cleft Bangladesh free project.

They are very much thankful to all the people behind this noble cause.

## **Confidence to face future for 46-year-old Mum Oleda and son.**

Mum Oleda Begum (46) and Dad Muhammad Abul Karim (52) brought their child Muhammad Abbdur Rahim aged 8 to the Bogra cleft surgery camp centre in September 2020 for a cleft lip surgery. Rahim had both cleft lip and palate deformities. In January 2020 he received his cleft palate correction. They have four children and Mr Karim works as an assistant carpenter as a daily labourer and he cannot find work hereby due to the rainy Monsoon season.

In January during their first visit, Cleft Bangladesh surgeon Dr Zaman was calling patients with parents for pre-surgery health check-up and Rahim entered the room with his mother. After inspecting the boy, the surgeon noticed that Mum Oleda also had an uncorrected cleft lip and immediately consulted with her and persuaded her to undergo surgery.

When she was asked why she did not get the treatment earlier, she answered that they (her family) live in a remote village at the Indian border of Rangpur and they did not know that it can be corrected. She is from a poor family and survival was the prime priority for her family during childhood. There were much bigger problems than cleft surgery at that time for their life and clefts were considered as a given at that time. Afterwards, she got married and as marriage has happened there was no time or priority for cleft correction. “I never expressed myself, but I have been carrying tons of anguish for this deformity. I suffered a lot for this. Whenever I see people are whispering around me, I feel humiliated and embarrassed. I never thought I could

receive emancipation from such a prolonged anguish and humiliation. My words cannot describe my gratitude for your help”.

## **Letter from Dr. Md Imrul Hasan Warsi**

Assistant Surgeon, Cleft Bangladesh.

*Dear Bruce,*

*October 2020*

*It's nice to hear from you.*

*On behalf of Cleft Children of Bangladesh, I would like to thank you and OCA for great support. I was born into a cleft family, so I know how much pain and sufferings a cleft family face in their day to day life. I have so many sad experiences in my memory of early childhood. I've seen my mum crying many times while she used to tell me about social stigma and discrimination, she experienced for being a mother of a cleft child. That's why I decided to dedicate my life for cleft children. Without support from you it would not be possible at all. And I am very much honoured to hear about your idea about my story in the newsletter. I'll be happy to share my passion so that other doctors encourage to work in this field and donors come forward to support for cleft children in poor countries.*

*I also have the very best memories of the time we spent together in Bangladesh and eagerly waiting to meet you again. Me and my family are well. I hope and wish you and your family are also very well.*

*Best regards,*

*Dr. Md Imrul Hasan Warsi.*

*Assistant Surgeon (Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery Team)*

*Cleft Bangladesh.*

Dr Imrul with his patients.



**This Christmas, please consider 'Gifting a Smile for Life'!**

**Please click here to make your  
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**You can donation online or send a donation directly to our bank account**

The Account Name: Operation Cleft Australia Inc.

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BSB 633 000 Account Number 165 147 935

(Please add your name as the reference and e-mail your name and address to [info@operationcleft.org.au](mailto:info@operationcleft.org.au)  
so that we can provide you with a tax receipt.)

**All donations no matter how small will help us towards  
our target of 1,500 cleft operations a year!  
We thank you in advance for your generosity!**

**Operation Cleft Australia**

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