



Medical and Educational Aid to Kenya

Heart Mission in conjunction with Evelina London Children's Hospital & March to the Top M.P Shah Hospital, Nairobi, Kenya
January 19th - 28th, 2017

Eye mission to Gatab and Loiylangalani, North Kenya
January 31st - February 9th, 2017

Trip diary - Mr Michael Fels, MEAK Trustee

Wednesday Jan 18th:

I met the 20 strong team (and a LOT of luggage! Including medical supplies, toys, educational supplies and children's clothes) at Heathrow at 6am to check in. After a long flight we finally arrived at Nairobi airport late in the evening.

After collecting all our luggage I approached customs to smooth the way to exit the building. We had a lot of boxes and they always attract a lot of (unwanted) attention. This time, more than usual. We were informed the Kenyan Government had banned all medical consumables from entering Kenya. Disaster! The team carry a great deal of essential donated medical kit and having it confiscated (or even opened and rendered non-sterile) could seriously affected the mission.

Despite members of the medical team attempting to assist, the customs official was not for moving and despair was beginning to set in amongst the medical team. As luck would have it a local doctor from the Kenyatta National Hospital was also having a conversation with customs. He managed to find an email on his phone from the Government to say the ban on medical consumables had been lifted. And with that, after two very frustrating hours, we were on our way.

How lucky we were that the young doctor was in the customs hall and had that email. I can't help thinking that it was some sort of divine intervention on behalf of MEAK. It is not the first time for me that this type of thing has happened on a MEAK mission.

We all crammed our way into a very overstuffed bus and we were finally on our way to the hotel.

Due to strike action by the Kenyan junior Doctors, we were unable to work at our usual Kenyatta National Hospital, home to MEAK heart missions since 2002. Fortunately, at the last minute MEAK's Mike Belliere, Alex Savis and Nargis Kasmani had managed to transfer the mission to the M.P. Shah hospital, which is all the way across town from the Kenyatta. Anyone who knows Nairobi knows how bad the traffic is. So the change in hospital necessitated a last minute change in hotel so we would not be too far from the hospital.

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We checked in to the Concord hotel much later than we expected to but we were all pleasantly surprised to see how lovely the hotel was. It's certainly the best digs that I have stayed in on a MEAK mission.

Thursday, Jan 19th:

An early start on Day 1 of surgery. Assessments were done and we had to learn the geography of the M.P Shah hospital, which we discovered to be a first class medical establishment. I got lost quite a few times as it's a very big facility and the areas where we were working was quite spread out.

The plan was always to try and do 2 operations each day but on the first day we could only manage 1 as it took quite a bit of time to set up. One operation (the closure of a hole in the heart on a 5 year old boy). This was the first paediatric cardiac surgery at M.P Shah. It was a long day as we did not get back to the hotel until 9pm.

Friday, Jan 20th:

David (Professor Anderson) our cardiac surgeon managed to play catch up and performed 3 operations today. It was baby day. L, a 6 month old baby girl, M, a 3 month old baby boy and H, a 20 month old baby boy all got their operations to close holes in the heart or remove obstructions that were blocking blood flow.

I made a couple of trips to get patients awaiting surgery from their accommodation to the hospital, which took longer than expected due to the Nairobi traffic.

At the end of the day I visited PICU (the Paediatric intensive care unit). I was really moved by the loving care and attention shown by our 2 intensive care nurses. I can't praise their dedication and passion too highly.

Another long and tiring day for the MEAK team, but the evening was lively in the hotel because we were celebrating Paul's (one of our intensive care doctors) birthday.

Saturday, Jan 21st:

Today's cases were F, a 3 year old girl needing a repair of a Tetralogy of Fallot (a hole in the heart and a muscular blockage preventing flow out of the heart) and B, a 4 month old baby boy needing several holes closed.

I was in theatre to watch the surgery on F. It was a risky operation and the little girls heart stopped as they were preparing her. I watched as they performed a heart massage before they could stabilise her for surgery. the operation took just over 4 hours and I was once again overwhelmed by the teamwork, dedication and skills of the theatre team. I really don't have the words to express my admiration for the whole of the MEAK team. F was fine.

Late afternoon I was stuck in heavily congested and polluting traffic ferrying patients to and fro as the surgery rota changed slightly and patients needed to be placed in accommodation.

Sunday, Jan 22nd:

S, a 10 year old girl need a re-operation to replace a heart valve. Professor Anderson had operated on her 5 years ago, but she had deteriorated. Unfortunately she developed complications on the table and surgery was not possible. S, a 3 year old boy needing a Tetralogy of Fallot repair.



The operation for S went well but later on in PICU he developed a complication. The intensive team did all they could, to replace the lost blood but he needed to go back to theatre. David and the theatre team had just got back to the hotel when they were called back and S had to be reopened. All ended well and the next morning he seems to be doing well. Another late night for the theatre team.

Monday, Jan 23rd:

Only one surgery scheduled for today. Intensive care and the ward are full. Our patient for today is B, a 9 year old boy needing a Tetralogy of Fallot operation.

We meeting with Mike Belliere, MEAK Director, Anup Shah CEO of MP Shah, Alex, MEAK heart programme co-ordinator and Tanuja, from the paediatric support group in Mombasa. There are discussions on how we can make this a self sustaining project and develop further missions with MP Shah hospital. We had a further meeting with the directors of the hospital and with the Jain social group who are a very philanthropic group of people. All looks very positive.

The board expressed their thanks and admiration to MEAK for the work they have done so far. They were also very impressed with the outreach eye clinics that MEAK undertake. They commented that MEAK go where most Kenyan's won't go. Mike Belliere also told them about our dental and orthopaedic teams.

I would like to think that we impressed the Jain Social Group enough to ensure some funding from them. We also discussed the possibility of a further heart mission to take place towards the end of this year.

Tuesday, Jan 24th:

I visited PICU first thing in the morning. All our surgical patients are doing well. S, the little girl on whom we were not able to operate was being discharged this morning. She has won the hearts of all the team and they are going to try and get a fundraising project to help her. We can only hope that we can help because she is very poorly and won't live beyond childhood. So sad. She leaves with armfuls of toys and books for her and her twin brothers. Dad has an old suitcase that we have given him to carry all of S's gifts (we don't need it anymore as we have already used the medical kit that it used to obtain). He is chuffed to bits.

Our surgical cases today are G, an 8 year old boy and M, a 6 year old boy who both need a Tetralogy of Fallot repair.

Wednesday, Jan 25th:

Today we are doing 3 operations. A, an 8 year old boy needing a Tetralogy of Fallot repair, C a 3 year old girl needing a shunt and S, an 11 months old boy needing a hole in the heart closed.

I watched M have all his tubes removed. What an amazing brave young man. Not a wince or moan and later that day we played balloon tennis together.

Mid morning we met up with Barbara March and her team from March to the Top. They did a tour of the hospital, visited theatre and saw all the children. They were amazed at what had been achieved and promised to try and help more missions in the future.

That evening the whole team were invited by the board of the hospital to an Indian restaurant. A magnificent



repast and far superior to anything I have had in the UK. At the end of the meal speeches of thanks were made and thanks given by the CEO of MP Shah saying how happy they were about our visit and hoped that we will be able to work together on many future missions.

Thursday, Jan 26th:

Today is the last day for operating and 3 operations are planned. R is a 3 year old boy needing an obstruction to one of the heart valves resected. Once on the table it was found that he had an additional and quite rare additional heart problem. This was called an AP window (aorto-pulmonary window) which is a hole connecting the two arteries. This is unusual and will require additional care in PICU. F is a 7 month old girl needing a hole in the heart to be closed. and N is a 5 year old girl requiring the same operation. N will be the final surgery for this trip.

Last night G, who was operated on two days ago and who has been struggling ever since, developed breathing problems. The anaesthetist was called in at 1am and had to fit a new breathing tube. This relieved his immediate symptoms but he remains in a critical condition. Let's hope that he can rally round....fingers crossed.

Friday, Jan 27th:

The final day. We need to pack up theatre, clean and store all our supplies, pack and arrange to get the heart lung machine back to Mombasa and hopefully leave the kids In PICU in a good condition to hand over to the MP Shah staff.

More time today spent in traffic, this time to pick 800 litres of water for next week's eye camp and get it to where our truck can pick it up and take it with all our equipment to go to the North of Kenya.

This was my first time on a MEAK heart trip and It was a privilege to work with such a dedicated and caring group of people. They should be truly proud of their efforts and the difference they have made to so many people's lives. Once again MEAK manages to punch way above it weight. A heartfelt thank you to you all

The MEAK trustees would also like to say a huge thanks to March To The Top for their sponsorship of this mission.

Saturday, Jan 28th:

Day 10 was all about getting theatre gear sent back either to UK with the team or storing the remainder at Nargis' house. We saying our goodbyes to the hospital. Later in the afternoon we go shopping with Nargis and Hiram for emergency food supplies for when we arrive at Gatab on Mount Kulal for the eye mission.

Sunday, Jan 29th:

The heart team have left and today was the first day off, spent by the pool, having an afternoon steam and massage and bingeing on Netflix. It's amazing how quickly a day can pass doing nothing.



Monday, Jan 30th:

My last day in Nairobi. I went to MP Shah and visited PICU one last time. S, S, C and M are all fine and well and leaving today. R and N will be going home tomorrow. F might be a bit longer but is doing well. G is still hanging in there but is still very poorly. Fingers and toes crossed.

We had 2 hours of stress when we heard that we had lost one seat on the plane tomorrow. We were making plans for one of the team, Arrimi to do the 2 day road trip, when Nargis managed to sort it out and we are all travelling tomorrow morning together.

Tuesday, Jan 31st:

Day 13 started at 5.30. All on time except for H who is going to be an hour late. We are all very annoyed with him. This means that a 20 minute journey to Wilson airport is going to take over an hour as the traffic is already heavy. Made it to the airport, but 1 hour late. Thank goodness it was just us on the plane.

The frustrations continue! On arrival at our destination H has left the computer on the plane! Now we have to get the hospital ready for the morning and the first patients. Got the first days registration forms prepared for both eye and dental clinics.

Accommodation is barely acceptable but this is Turkana! No showers available for us boys, but the girls accommodation did so went over there for my shower. G passed away last night at the M. P Shah hospital. Very sad, but expected. RIP little G.

Wednesday, Feb 1st:

We had the Chief County Medical Coordinator and his assistant from Marsabit North to host an opening ceremony for the mission. There is a population of somewhere between 3000 & 6000 people (depends on who you ask) living in Gatab on Mt Culal. The population is spread over a large area.

Today we registered 117 patients for screening, of which 17 required surgery, 16 cataracts and 1 TPR (tarsal plate rotation). 96 dental patients were screened.

Thursday, Feb 2nd:

Things were a bit quieter today. Only 65 people screened and 5 cataract surgeries performed. I went with two others to screen at the local primary school, which was in walking distance of the hospital. We screened another 96 children, most were fine and 12 needed medicines. We taught them how to care for their eyes better. Dental was once again busy with 36 patients.

Considering the difficult terrain and the widely spread out population, we served the community rather well. The people of Mt Culal do not have TVs or bars to give them bad habits and I found them to be the calmest and most friendly of people that I have come across in the years I have spent working in Northern Kenya.

Late this evening an ambulance arrived from Marsabit with two patients. A young man with corneal scars which unfortunately we can't help as his injury was over 5 years old. Why his mother waited so long to seek treatment is beyond me. The other patient is a young girl that needs a Corneal transplant graft. Nargis has agreed to get this girl on the waiting list. It could take anything up to 6 months to get one, but as they say in Kenya poli poli...slowly slowly.



Friday, Feb 3rd:

Post ops to see to and theatre to dismantle, packing to be done and then we are going down to Longalani to set up an eye camp there. Hopefully we will be reunited with the laptop which means Nargis and Christine having to work overtime to upload the data we have already collected.

41 people arrived for eye screening this morning. One is a 15 year old boy who had a traumatic cataract which Hiram operated on this morning. We trust the hospital staff to do his post op bandage removal and eye drops tomorrow. Dental was also busy with 30 patients for treatment.

It's going to delay our departure a bit but we can't leave them without seeing them all. That's the MEAK way! What a horrid journey down the mountain. Myself and Catherine took our seats in the last vehicle which turned out to be the service truck for the wind power company which they used to shift diesel and oil. It stunk and as we went down the mountain and it got hotter the fumes got worse and worse. It was an insult to send such a vehicle and the fumes impregnated all luggage in the back and some of the water we carried.

Finally got to our accommodation about 7pm . No one could sleep because of the extreme heat.

Saturday, Feb 4th:

Arrived at the clinic. What a nightmare! There was nowhere for our patients to sleep no beds, no mattresses nothing! Luckily they have almost finished building a maternity unit. I got the key and at this moment they are clearing all the rubbish out, cleaning the floors and making it habitable. One of the staff went out and came back with about 10 mattresses.

Conditions here are difficult to say the least. 40 degree heat, strong winds. Not good when we are doing registrations outside. The dust is really blowing in our eyes and papers are flying about. My eyes already feel so sore.

The staff here are unprepared for our visit and there has been little forward planning. I give a motivational talk (i.e speak with the local team) and ask again for them to borrow more mattresses and arrange food for our patients.

Am going to see the local church and mosque to get them to tell their congregations about our visit here.

My motivational talk has paid off. After taking a break to watch Arsenal get thrashed by Chelsea I returned to the clinic to see enough mattresses for all of the patients operated on today and to see them all eating a good meal.

123 eyes screened today with 18 surgeries, 17 cataract operations and 1 TPR. 42 dental patients were also seen.

Sunday, Feb 5th:

It's Sunday and it was much quieter than I expected. Maybe because of church. It was more motivational words from me, and I have been motivating till I have no voice left. The gentleman in charge of the clinic who has been the main recipient of my motivational talks does not seem to be particularly motivated. I will keep pushing him though till we finish Wednesday night.



We screened 83 People, operated upon 7 cataracts and 1 TPR today, plus 31 dental patients. We also have young girl who will need surgery in Nairobi which Nargis will organise.

Monday, Feb 6th:

Busy start today. Very hot, very windy, very hard working conditions .

We screen 153 eyes and perform 11 surgeries. 86 dental patients were seen. It's 3pm and we are finished for the day. I'm disappointed by the lack of support from some of the local team. Little outreach work is being seen to being done and the county have only arranged 1 meal per day for the patients. I have made arrangements for the overnight patients to get mandazi (kenyan donuts) and tea in the morning at a cost of 100ks per person. I think we are all sleep deprived and my good humour is disappearing fast!

Tuesday, Feb 7th:

There were 3 bilaterally blind ladies in post op this morning who refused surgery the first day, but when they heard how successful we had been with other patients they came back. They have just had their bandages removed and are staying overnight tonight so we can operate on their other eye tomorrow.

2 drivers set out to pick up people whom might need help, but people were brought in just needing medicines. I wonder how many more surgical patients could have brought in, but sometimes it is out of your hands.

In total we screened 96 eyes of which 13 needed cataract surgery. 13 dental patients requiring treatment were seen.

I went with the ambulance on a 180km round trip to screen at a village, 6 of the people needing surgery came from that trip. Frustratingly, we have now lost our second vehicle for retrieving patients. It was called away on an emergency.

Wednesday, Feb 8th:

The wind and heat is relentless. So few people registered. 9 cataracts today and 8 dental surgeries . It's 12.30 and we are done. Theatre being dismantled hospital and just post ops to do tomorrow morning.

Thursday, Feb 9th:

Post op checks are done. Everyone operated on left very happy. The van is packed and on its way and we are now just waiting for the plane at 3pm. Nothing to do but lie under my mosquito net and sweat. When we left Loiyangalani the temperature was 42 degrees so the 31 degrees when we landed back at Nairobi felt decidedly chilly. Now I have 3 days R&R before heading home to the family.

This has been the hottest hardest and frustrating of all the missions I have been on so far with MEAK, however the number of people whom we have helped and the number of eyes we have restored vision to has made it all worthwhile.

Total patients screened - 693

Total patients treated with medicines - 655 eyes 365 dental

Number of reading glasses given - 108



Total Cataract operations - 93

Total TPR operations - 4

Total trauma Cataracts - 5

Other minor operations - 10

Total dental operations - 232

There are many people to acknowledge for the success on this mission:

- At the top of the list is Nargis Kasmani who has spent a lot of unseen time organising this mission from A to Z.
- Don Smith, CEO of Flight 540 who's donation of flights made the whole thing possible.
- Steven Labarakwe, the Chief Medical Officer of Marsabit county and Dr Dokale also from Marsabit county.
- Nick Tailor of Lake Turkana wind power project who gave us the transport up to Gatab
- The council of Turkana who have provided us with food accommodation and vehicles
- Magne Albrigsten of Cedars restaurant who provided us with all of our water, and
- Last but not at all least the whole of the MEAK eye and dental team who have worked in very difficult conditions with passion and good humour.

Thank you one and all.