

Kathmandu, Nepal Hand Surgery Outreach trip August 2023

In August this year Dr David Graham led a team of volunteers to the National Trauma Centre, Kathmandu, Nepal at the invitation of Dr Shilu Shrestha. The team consisted of Dr David Graham (Hand Surgeon – Gold Coast), Dr Brahman Sivakumar (Hand Surgeon - Sydney), Dr Sarah Brereton (Orthopaedic unaccredited registrar – Gold Coast), Paul Foster (Accredited Hand Therapist), Clancy Kemety (Accredited Hand Therapist) and Graham Hextell (Orthopaedic Outreach). This trip was facilitated by Lisa (Loopy) from AUSNEP and also included nursing staff Vin, Maggie and Hayley (all from the Gold Coast).

Dr Shilu Shrestha is the only fellowship trained hand and microsurgeon in Nepal and is a pioneer female surgeon. Dr Shilu is dedicating her career to advance the practice of hand and microsurgery throughout Nepal. This visit included provision of donated equipment, technical oversight during hand surgeries and treatment as well as facilitation and support of a scientific meeting.

Patients were pre-identified by Dr Shrestha and her registrars and brought into a joint clinic with our two hand surgeons and therapists. This allowed for collaborative discussion and guidance through management for the 34 patients reviewed. There was a significant trend of machinery and road accidents with delayed presentation to tertiary centres. Many open fractures had been managed with suturing and casting only. Management in the tertiary centres was primarily with K wire fixation for all hand and elbow fractures.

During the visit, 15 operations were carried out including wrist fusions, metacarpal and phalangeal osteotomies, a flexor sheath washout, a thumb ulnar collateral ligament reconstruction, post burn contracture releases with skin grafts, a distal radius osteotomy and long nerve cable grafts. These included combined operations with Dr Shilu, as well as operations with the Nepalese registrars as the primary surgeons, guided by Dr Graham and Dr Sivakumar. One twenty-eight-year-old male had a significant functional and cosmetic deformity from a distal radius fracture non-union as a child. Intra-operatively his radius was noted to be too sclerotic for the initial plan of primary fusion so he underwent a masquetelet procedure - with a future plan for our next visit to proceed with a free fibula flap.

A full day workshop led by local hand therapist Sanju and supported by our hand therapists Paul Foster (The Palms Hand Therapy) and Clancy Tisdell (North Shore Hand Therapy) was well received by the local physiotherapists. Lectures included non-operative management for hand conditions and post-surgery rehab protocols. The afternoon saw practical classes on casting and thermoplastic splinting. Sanju has formed an online network with the attendees and the hand therapists will all continue to provide advice once the physiotherapists return to their local centres.

The trip culminated in a CME symposium on hand surgery. This comprised of a full day of lectures from the hand surgeons and hand therapists. Nepalese orthopaedic surgeons and registrars had travelled from a range of hospitals in Kathmandu and other cities to attend. The CME participants commended the day and requested for this to become an annual event. Feedback also included wanting a practical workshop, more case presentations and collaborative discussions for next year.

We hope this will continue as an ongoing annual partnership with Dr Shrestha and Sanju. We are planning for next year's visit, and hope to include a possible microsurgery workshop, and possible donation / micro equipment ? In the meantime we will endeavour to contribute advice and support from afar with monthly zoom meetings and WhatsApp chat groups and as proud international members of the newly formed Nepalese Hand Society.

A sincere thank you to AUSNEP for organising the visit, as well as to the Australian Hand Surgery Society and Orthopaedic Outreach for assisting with funding. Thanks also to Medartis for generously donating equipment.

