

20th.June 2010

Report on visit of two paediatric surgeons Dr.Ibrahim Al-Naieb and Dr. Tilman Gresing and paediatrician Dr. Morley Wright to Sierra Leone from 12th-26th March 2010

The visit had been planned and organised with the assistance of Dr. Mbaimba Baryoh, Surgeon Specialist in Freetown , who had undertaken to offer his services in recruiting and screening of patients for the operations. Dr.Dave Wright had also consented to provide the necessary assistance in his function as President of the Sierra Leone Medical and Dental Council.

This being a humanitarian project the three participants had decided to personally finance the costs for the air tickets to Sierra Leone. It was however necessary to raise funds for accomodation, transportation in Sierra Leone and provision of drugs and other medical equipment required for the project. This was achieved with the aid of a flyer designed by us and sent to prospective donors and an appeal for donations in the local news media.Fundraising was organised under the umbrella of BINTUMANI SL- German Sierra Leone Society in which two of the participants are members. We were thus able to generate enough funds through donations from individuals, firms and other institutions to enable us to achieve the financial basis required for the fulfilment of our goals. Most notably , as a result of the reputation of the team we received much financial and moral support from local paediatricians. We were able to solicit the support of His Excellency Mr. Jongopie Stevens, Ambassador of Sierra Leone to the Federal Republic of Germany, who wholeheartedly endorsement of the project and also assisted in establishing the necessary contacts with the Ministry of Health and Sanitation in Freetown. In preparation for the visit contact had been established with colleagues at the Connaught Hospital in Freetown who provided us with a list of drugs and other materials required for the project.

Aims of the project:

- To offer free treatment to children of all ages with surgical conditions which for one reason or the other could not be treated in Sierra Leone either because of financial constraints or lack of expertise or appropriate equipment .
- To establish professional contact with local surgeon specialists and paediatricians with the aim of creating a basis for future cooperation in the field of paediatric surgery.
- To offer informal training in paediatric surgical procedures to young doctors and other staff .
- To generate interest amongst young doctors and medical students for the subspecialty of paediatric surgery.

The team comprising the two paediatric surgeons Dr.Ibrahim Al-Naieb und Dr. Tilman Gresing and myself as coordinator of the project departed from Frankfurt airport with Brussels Airlines for Freetown on 12th.march 2010. Despite the generous baggage allowance offered by Brussels Airlines it was still necessary to pay for excess baggage for the transportation of the drugs, materials and instruments required.

Arrival in Freetown

On arrival in Freetown we were met at the airport by two official representatives of the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, Dr. Sarah Conteh and Mr. Yahyah Conteh who were very helpful with the customs formalities.They had also organised the vehicle for our transfer from Lungi Airport to our accomodation at Aberdeen Village .

On Saturday 13th.inst. we had a meeting with Dr. Rogers and Dr.T.S.Dumbuya, specialist surgeons and their staff at the Connaught Hospital to discuss the practical details of the project.Dr. Dumbuya took us on a short tour of the Connaught Hospital. Thereafter the patients who had been invited were screened and selected with the assistance of two resident doctors for the operation list on the following Monday .

Transportation

A vehicle had been assigned to us from the Ministry of Health and Sanitation but the service was rather unreliable. We therefore decided to make alternative arrangements with the assistance of Mr.Gbloh, the local representative of the Bintumani Organisation in Freetown

Activities at the Connaught Hospital

On Monday 15th.March we met Dr. Boima, Chief Surgeon Specialist and Head of the Surgical Unit at Connaught Hospital with whom final details were specified. Two young doctors, Dr.Sarah Conteh and Dr.James were assigned to work with the visiting surgeons. The scheduled operations for this day and the next could be performed as planned. It was however on occasion necessary for us to provide locally purchased intravenous fluids and other medications for the patients.

On Wednesday 17th.March we were confronted with a strike action of junior doctors and nursing staff which made it impossible to utilise the facilities at the Connaught Hospital. Moreover, the postoperative care of the patients was endangered. With the assistance and intervention of Dr.Mbaimba Baryoh in his capacity as Medical Director of the Choithram's Memorial Hospital we were able to transfer the patients to this hospital. Arrangements were also made for the use of the theatre facilities commencing on Friday 19th.inst. The management of the hospital granted permission to use of the staff and equipment free of charge.

Visit to the Ola During Children's Hospital

The interruption of surgical activities gave us the opportunity to pay a visit to the Ola During Children's Hospital. There we were welcomed by Dr. David Baion, Paediatrician Specialist –in-Charge and the Matron-in-Charge, who took us on a conducted tour of the hospital. He informed us that the hospital was being supported by the German organisation Cap Anamur and the Welbodi Foundation from U.K. I discovered that there has been much improvement since my last visit in September 2008. New beds and oxygen concentrators have been provided. Unfortunately most patients had been discharged home due to the strike. We also had the opportunity of making the acquaintance of the local representative of Cap Anamur, Mr. Basma.

We donated a pulse oximeter to Dr. Baion for use at the hospital. On a subsequent visit a week later drugs and other materials which were not used for the project were presented to the hospital.



Dr. Morley Wright presenting a pulse oximeter to Dr. David Baion and staff

Treatment of patients at the Choithrams Memorial Hospital

Thanks to the benevolence of the management of the Choithram's Memorial Hospital it became possible for the surgeons to resume their activities on the 19th of March. Doctors and other staff were very cooperative and enthusiastic especially since they were not accustomed to care for such numbers of paediatric patients. Commendable was the preparation of two paediatric wards to accommodate the patients.

Unfortunately the doctors assigned to the project from the Connaught Hospital were involved in the strike and therefore did not participate any further.

Lecture by Dr. Gresing

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On Wednesday 24th. Of March Dr.Tilman Gresing delivered a lecture on treatment of thermal injury in children to staff and students of the College of Medicine and Health Sciences and the Connaught Hospital. This was well attended despite the ongoing strike.



Dr.Gresing delivering his lecture



Dr.Al-Naieb with members of staff at the Ola During Children's hospital



Dr.M.Wright presenting materials and drugs to Dr.Baion and the Matron.



Surgeons operating at Choithram's Memorial Hospital

Results

The surgeons were able to perform 39 surgical procedures on 29 patients as follows:

- 18 inguinal hernias
- 7 large umbilical hernias
- 3 hypospadias
- 2 cryptorchidism

- 1 lipomyelomeningocele
- 1 hydrocephalus
- 2 congenital branchial cleft sinus
- 1 abscess of the abdominal wall
- 1 Z-plastic scar operation of contracture with skin graft following burns
- 1 wound dressing after skin graft in general anaesthesia
- 1 anal atresia
- 1 corrective reconstruction after hypospadias operation

Summary

Despite the negative effects of the strike which resulted in a two-day interruption of surgical activities the surgeons were able to continue with the treatment of the children at Choithram's Memorial Hospital. This was made possible through the efforts of Dr.Mbaimba Baryoh and the generosity of Mr. Harish Krishna, Director of the hospital, who permitted the use of the facilities at no cost to the patients. The cases treated were either such in which the parents could not afford to pay for the treatment or because of lack of expertise or appropriate instruments to perform the operations.

Some patients who could not be treated either because of their age or because of the short time at our disposal have been earmarked for treatment during the next visit of the team. The paediatric surgeons consider the project a success and intend to repeat it next year. In two other cases treatment option in Germany is being explored, because their ailments are complex and cannot be managed adequately in Sierra Leone.

Unfortunately, the intention to involve young doctors to participate in the operations could not be achieved due to the strike. However, the staff at the Choithram's Memorial Hospital benefited from informal teaching during ward rounds.

The project was given good press coverage both in the print media and on radio and television.

Acknowledgements

We express our profound gratitude to Dr.Mbaimba Baryoh for his input in the organisation and preparation of the project in Freetown without which the venture could not have been realised. He was also instrumental in negotiating the terms for the use of the facilities at the Choithram's Memorial Hospital. Our gratitude goes also to Dr.Dave Wright for his assistance in the organisation of the trip. We thank Mr.Harish Krishna and the authorities and staff of the Choithram's Hospital for giving us the opportunity to successfully complete the project. We thank Dr.Boima and his colleagues and staff of the Connaught Hospital for their support and the permission to use the theatre.

We would also like to express our appreciation to the Ministry of Health and Sanitation for provision of transport for the transfer to and from Lungi.

We would like to thank Dr. Dave Wright and the Rotary Club Freetown, Dr and Mrs Baryoh, Dr. and Mrs.Robbin-Coker,Dr.Effie Gooding and husband,Mr.and Mrs. Mason and Dr.Basma for the hospitality extended to us,which contributed to making our stay a pleasant one.

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Critical evaluation

The visiting surgeons are convinced that the humanitarian intervention was a success and intend to repeat it next year. The idea of bringing expertise to patients rather than have them sent abroad for treatment should be endorsed. For future projects it would be expedient for prospective patients to be screened and selected at an early stage during the organisation and the requirements for special instruments communicated to the surgeons before their departure for Sierra Leone. In this regard early involvement of paediatricians and surgeons should be encouraged.

It is hoped that it would be possible to use the facilities at the Choithram's Memorial Hospital again.

The organisers in Germany intend to intensify fund-raising activities to generate sufficient financial resources to facilitate a longer duration of the intervention. It is hoped that funds could be made available to the organisers in Freetown for the publicity necessary for the recruitment and screening of patients thus reducing dependency on official sources.

In future postoperative care and follow-up of patients by local surgeons and other doctors should be better organised.

Dr. Morley Wright

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