



# Australia Sri Lanka Medical Aid Team



Australia Sri Lanka Medical Aid Team 18<sup>th</sup> visit to Sri Lanka - December 2009

## Team members:

- Doctors: Kamala De Silva, Sian Hughes, Thanuja Ranatunga (Katugampala)
- Pharmacy organiser: Sam Heselev
- Pharmacy assistant: Michelle de Silva
- Interpreter/helper: Nihal Gamage and his nephew Marlon and Hirosh our driver

## Generous benefactors included:

- Grade 3 students at Grimwade House, Melbourne Grammar School
- Kaye Thomas and family
- Beth Wilson
- Marie Orr
- All of you who have donated to AuSLMAT functions over the year.

This small group went on a short visit to conduct clinics distribute wheelchairs and assess several projects.

## Clinics

We held two clinics at Nigel Kerner’s tea estate at Samanala. The first day was quiet, with two doctors seeing 140 patients. The second day we saw 260 patients – fortunately Dr Thanuja arrived from Colombo in the afternoon so we managed to finish the clinic by 7pm. Marian, Mary and George together with the tea estate employees and the wonderful multilingual Ms Leila helped us throughout.



*Dr Kamala De Silva at work*



*Patients at Samanala*



Many patients from previous clinics returned with their prescriptions from last year. We managed to confirm that one abdominal mass was an unsuspected pregnancy in a woman due to leave for Saudi Arabia to work. She had been given the Depo injection but obviously too late. Corallee Morrow had given us a box of pregnancy tests, which we fortunately had not yet delivered to the maternity hospital so we could test on the spot.



*A positive pregnancy test*



*Marlon and Nihal working in the pharmacy*



*Sam next to an eight year old boy and his family*

Several patients had severe hypertension. Some were previously diagnosed but had not understood that they had to continue taking this medication for life. Three boys arrived together with severe eczema and Mary set up a skin clinic. There was a lot of scabies, asthma and the usual arthritis and failure to thrive. One family had an eight year old the size of a three year old who was dwarfed by 6' 1" Sam. We also distributed large quantities of worm therapy.



*Severe dry skin and eczema*



The state of tooth decay was the worst we have seen in Sri Lanka. We believe the locals drink from the river so do not get fluoride. We gave every child a toothbrush, including siblings who were not present, and every family a tube of toothpaste. We distributed more than 400 toothbrushes.



The day after the clinics a truck arrived from Colombo with 20 wheelchairs donated by the Grade three children at Grimwade House, Melbourne Grammar School. We had three recipients at Samanala: a young girl with quadriplegic cerebral palsy, a child with Down Syndrome who had great difficulty walking any distance and an old man with bilateral club feet who found walking very painful.



*Girl with quadriplegia*



*Girl with Down Syndrome and weakness*



*Man with club feet*



After the clinic Sam and Michelle worked hard to record all the medication we had used. We distributed the remaining medication to other clinics in the tea country.



**Other clinics**

***Central Dispensary Galbokka Weligama***

We gave Dr Nimali Munasinghe a new nebuliser, glucometer and strips, ophthalmoscope, auroscope, stethoscope and two blood pressure machines bought with funds from Beth Wilson's birthday.

***Hangarapitiya Primary Care Unit***

Dr Ushani Jayalathge has just started work at the State Dispensary in the remote village of Hangarapitiya and was desperate for asthma medication to help the children. We gave her a box of asthma supplies as well as scabies treatments and vitamins. We will invite her to join us at the next clinic in Samanala.



*Dr Nimali at Weligama*



*Hangarapitiya primary care unit with Dr Jayalathge*



***Wanarajah Estate dispensary Dickoya***



We gave Dr Shanmugarajah a nebuliser, glucometer and strips, books and many asthma devices as well as a wheelchair for a disabled estate worker. Dr Quintus and Dr Jennifer will be doing a clinic at this estate in June.



### *Penny Stork's estate*

Penny brought us "lunch" at Nawalapityia which turned into tea as we arrived at 5pm. She had kindly waited all day for us as we toured the hill country dropping off supplies. She has four people on her estate who have lost legs from diabetes so was very happy to take four wheelchairs and will send us photos of the recipients. We have promised to do a clinic at her estate in 2011.

## Hospitals

### *Lady Ridgeway Children's Teaching Hospital in Colombo*

Sian gave a lecture on autism to the paediatricians and child psychiatrists and was treated to lunch at the consultants room. She met a child neurologist who trained with Dr Simon Harvey at the Royal Children's Hospital. Simon provided an EEG machine for Lady Ridgeway's and visited earlier in 2009 to give lectures and ward rounds. He has the software available for video EEG monitoring but this requires a dedicated laptop and AuSLMAT may be able to help secure the necessary funding for this hardware.

The following day we joined Dr Pushpa Punchihewa for a fascinating ward round which included the following cases:



This six month baby had severe protein malnutrition with clubbing of the fingers. His mother was very depressed and we took her out to buy food for her.



We met a six year old girl who had travelled from Jaffna down the recently reopened highway. She had severe spina bifida and her mother had been waiting six years for paediatric help. We were able to give her a wheelchair and her mother was so excited she ran up and down the ward pushing her daughter. We also gave two wheelchairs to the rheumatology wards, one to a boy with severe scoliosis who has lost the power in his legs and the other to a girl with juvenile arthritis.



*The girl with spina bifida from Jaffna*



*The boy with severe scoliosis*



*The girl with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis*



The hospital had only bars of soap for hand washing so we bought bottles of hand disinfectant and 30 bottles of antibacterial handwash and presented these to the nurses. Our other gift was warmly appreciated – a resuscitator bag – the ward had lost their only bag a week earlier.



***Paediatric ward at Embilipytia Base Hospital***

The toilet project is going ahead thanks to a generous donation by Dr Stanley Rajapakse and his wife Suramya from Wangaratta and under supervision by the Foundation of Goodness. We visited the wards and the toilets are dilapidated with one constantly leaking water over the floor. Ceiling rails were already in place for curtains to screen the resuscitation area and the work will be progressing over the next few months.

We delivered two wheelchairs for disabled children, a nebuliser and resuscitator bag and gave small Christmas presents to all the children on the ward.



*Dilapidated toilets*



*Wheelchairs for the ward*



*Presents for the children*

***Nawalapitiya District Hospital***

We had four wheelchairs left by the time we reached Nawalapitiya and the pediatricians there said they had plenty of children who would love a wheelchair so we left them to be distributed. We also left a nebuliser and made a list of some essential items that are still required. Dr Kamala de Silva had also visited earlier in the day to see the equipment she provided earlier this year.



*The team at Nawalapitiya Hospital*



*Wheelchair donation*



*Delivery to Karanwanella*

Other Donations were made to:

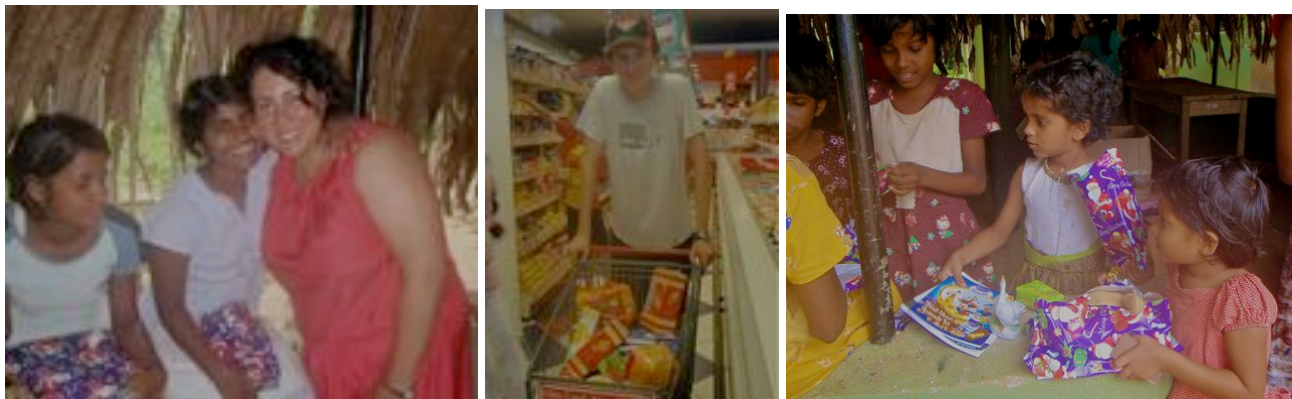
***Karawanella Base Hospital*** - adult wheelchair

***Kethumathi Maternity Hospital*** – adult wheelchair and pregnancy testing kits

***Panadura Base Hospital*** – adult wheelchair for coronary care

## **Embilipitiya Orphanage**

The situation at this orphanage is dire – the benefactor died and her estate was left to her brother. He has disappeared but the large house in which the 35 girls live continues to function as an orphanage with minimal government funding of 30 rupees a day per child for all food and care! The orphanage depends on charity to survive but the location is very remote.



We gave all the girls soft toys, paper and crayons and a box of clothes. We also took two trolleys of food and donated \$150 to their funds. We would like to have a separate private fundraiser for this orphanage.

## **Caritas Convent, Moratuwa**

We called in to see Sister Jacinta on Christmas Eve. We were not expected and the disabled school was closed but we had three boxes of toys and a trolley of food. Sister Jacinta was overwhelmed and kept saying that God must have sent us because she had no presents for the children. Now she would be able to give them all something on Christmas Day.

With some persuasion she said that she would like a water filter for the children and a food processor for a child with a disability. We bought these before we left.



The centre is still requesting an exercise bike to strengthen leg muscles and a basic laptop, so if anyone has these items to donate, please let us know and we can provide transport.

## Other activities

Kaye Thomas and her family gave us \$500 in lieu of their own Christmas presents and we used this to buy presents for children on the paediatric ward and other children that we knew would have otherwise had nothing for Christmas. We bought an industrial sewing machine for a young family outside Colombo, the father is unemployed and the mother has just had their third child.



*Shoe voucher and bat  
School backpack and stationary*



*A secondhand industrial sewing machine*

Dr Thanuja had seen a very disabled man making his way down the main road between Colombo and Kitulgala. We saved him a wheelchair but he could not use it because he has one arm on which he drags himself around. He needs a specially modified chair and we will make inquiries to see if we can get one made for him. We gave his wheelchair to an older girl with cerebral palsy in Kadawella whose own chair was very dilapidated.



*A very brave but disappointed man who we can hopefully help.      A quadriplegic 17 year old*

If anyone is interested in joining us for a visit to Sri Lanka, please make contact – no special skills are needed, just enthusiasm and money to pay your way!

Dr Quintus de Zylva and Dr Jennifer Johns are leading a trip in June 2010 and Dr Sian Hughes and family are planning a visit for three weeks in January 2011.

For more information go to [www.auslmat.com.au](http://www.auslmat.com.au) or email/phone a committee member – contacts are on the website.

**Report by Dr Sian Hughes, Paediatrician and Vice-president of AuSLMAT**