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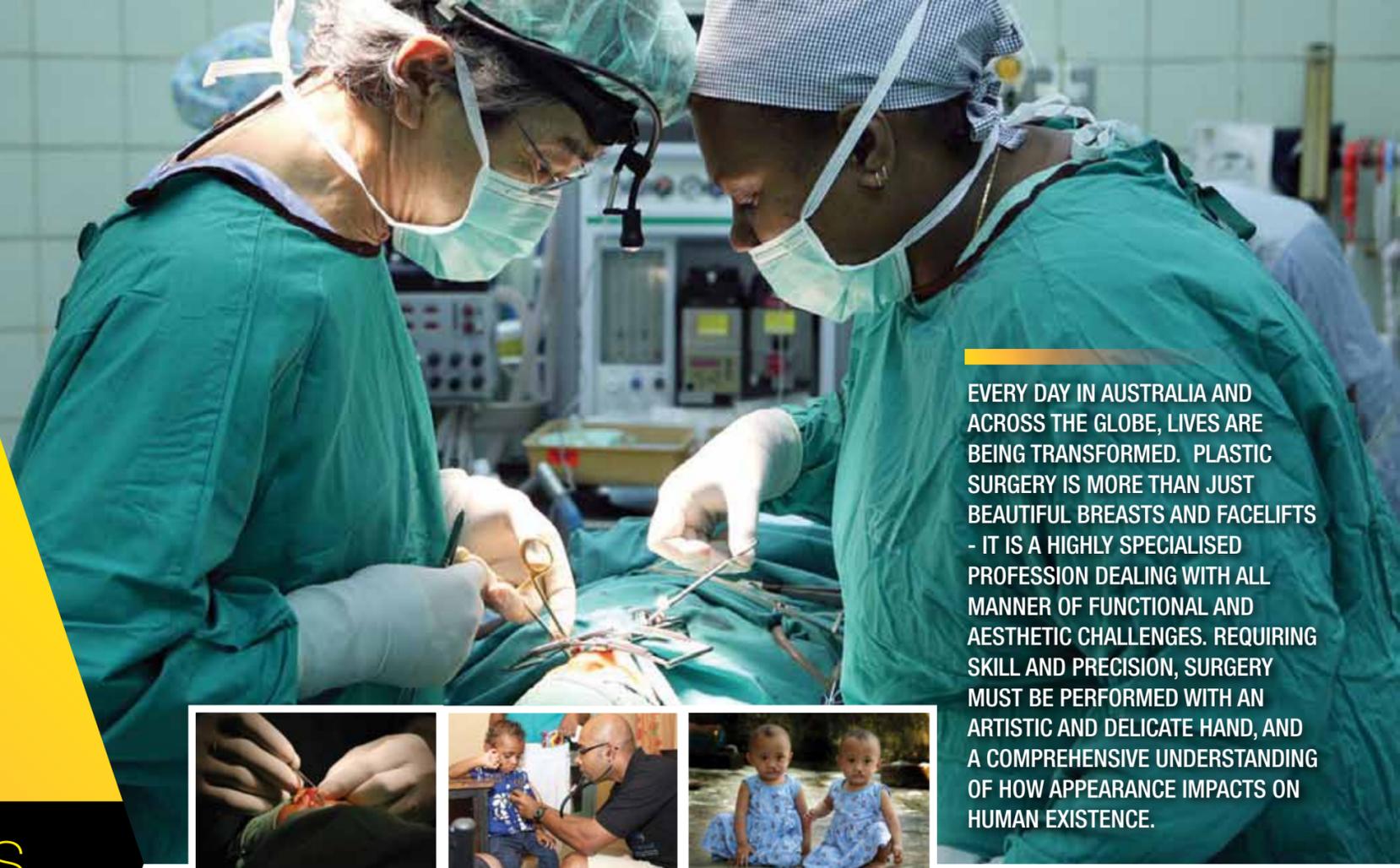


RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY:

AUSTRALIAN SURGEONS

TRANSFORMING LIVES

Written by Melinda Barlow



EVERY DAY IN AUSTRALIA AND ACROSS THE GLOBE, LIVES ARE BEING TRANSFORMED. PLASTIC SURGERY IS MORE THAN JUST BEAUTIFUL BREASTS AND FACELIFTS - IT IS A HIGHLY SPECIALISED PROFESSION DEALING WITH ALL MANNER OF FUNCTIONAL AND AESTHETIC CHALLENGES. REQUIRING SKILL AND PRECISION, SURGERY MUST BE PERFORMED WITH AN ARTISTIC AND DELICATE HAND, AND A COMPREHENSIVE UNDERSTANDING OF HOW APPEARANCE IMPACTS ON HUMAN EXISTENCE.

Australia has an abundance of highly skilled plastic, aesthetic and reconstructive surgeons, who have, for the most part, completed their training right here on home soil. Many have ventured off to learn further afield once their initial training was completed, but all have returned, bringing with them the very latest techniques and procedures from across the globe. Our local surgeons rank amongst the best in the world and are internationally renowned within their field of expertise.

There is a certain glamour attached to the profession of plastic surgery – this is undeniable. However the celebrity and the glitz and hype often overshadow the real stories, the human stories. Those of everyday people going through enormous difficulties, and the surgeons that are there for them, every step of the way, helping to piece their lives back together.

There are numerous stories about the moment someone's life was turned upside down, but little is publicised about the unsung heroes of the event – the surgeons. Maybe it was a workplace injury – a crushed hand, a deeply lacerated leg. Or a badly damaged nose as the legacy of a sporting career – rhinoplasty after years of suffering allows not only an improved appearance but the capacity for the simplest of functions – free and easy breathing. Surgeons are performing the most delicate of procedures, and restoring form and function, in the midst of fear and trauma as patients recover from shocking accidents, they never expected to have.

A lot of our surgeons share a common vision in the surgical possibilities that can transform the lives of children. Having travelled in developing countries, or seen documentaries about birth defects or facial disfigurements, the seed was planted to choose

a career where they could make a difference. For many that was reconstructive surgery. Non profit organisations such as Interplast Australia & New Zealand (Interplast) and OSSA, provide free reconstructive surgeries to patients that may not otherwise be able to receive treatment. They support surgical training and implement health programs in over 25 countries to ensure better aesthetic outcomes for people in need. Australian surgeons featured in this very issue are volunteering their time for organisations just like this one.

The impact of reconstructive facial surgery is immeasurable in countless cases. Children living in remote villages that have been ostracized because of their facial deformities have had their whole life turned around by their equivalent of a knight in shining armour – or in this case - scrubs. A series of surgeries, correcting displacement of features or reconstructing where abnormalities exist, has provided them with a 'normal appearance' and a second chance. Having the opportunity to reintegrate into the community, go to school, make friends and achieve a healthy abundant social existence is a small thing, but provides the one thing every child is entitled to – a normal childhood.

Then there are the things we are totally unprepared for – devastating life events that change everything in an instant. Horrific car accidents, gunshot wounds, the remnants of years of physical abuse. It is a sad irony that such trauma had to happen to get us there, but Australia has led the world in its innovative approach to treatments for burn victims, as a result of tragedies such as the Bali bombings and the fires of Black Saturday.

Finally, there are the countless women that have been affected by breast cancer. But it's not just the women it. Whole families, whole communities

are affected when someone is diagnosed. Many of our surgeons have lost mothers, sisters and wives, to breast cancer and this became the motivation behind their practice. Their approach to patient care can't help but be informed by this, and families are the fortunate beneficiaries. Seeing husbands and children watch the most important woman in their life become a shell of herself is one of life's great heartbreaks. We have learnt in this issue, why many of our surgeons got into breast reconstruction surgery. Their stories are deeply moving and highly emotional, and the result is a surgeon who sits with families, holds their hand, calmly and patiently answering question after question. Then when he nods, and says I understand, well, families can be comforted somewhat by this, because he really does.

There is a fine line between vanity and dignity. Our perception of our personal appearance affects how we move around in the world, whether we like it or not. Suffering though disfigurements can be psychologically scarring and emotionally debilitating and the impact of reconstruction can be life changing. In a lot of cases, reconstruction is necessary to restore basic function, but in others it is for emotional well being as much as anything else. For a woman to feel whole again, and have her feminine self restored, or for a child to lift his face to the world with pride rather than shame. These are the human faces of reconstruction.

In this issue we feature state by state some of the very best reconstructive surgeons in the world. They are extraordinary professionals and they are all right here in Australia, ready and waiting for you. Read their stories, learn why they do what they do and get inspired.

TRANSFORMING

LIVES

THE SURGEONS' STORIES

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MR DAVID MORGAN
INTERPLAST

I had known about Interplast since I started training in plastic surgery. It was always something that I had wanted to do. I made enquiries when I was a trainee but they only send fully qualified surgeons as volunteers. I was fortunate enough to be asked along to a trip to Tonga last year with a friend from Sydney. We really had a great trip. I loved the team aspect of it - the collaboration with the other doctors and nurses, and meeting the locals.

Tonga has very good facilities but our work there is to help out with the sheer volume of work that needs to be done. We do surgeries that the local surgeons either don't have time to get to, or don't quite have the skills yet to do. By bringing in expertise they don't have access to, we boost the available manpower and this helps them to get through the things that need to be done all the time. I've recently taken on the country coordinator's role for Tonga and we are going back there again in early November. It will be largely the same team, and my job will be to make sure the services provided are well controlled and properly manned.

A lot of developing countries spend a lot of money to put the infrastructure in place but don't necessarily have the skillsets to implement or maintain it. This is where Interplast's work is invaluable.

For more information on Mr David Morgan see 'Renew Plastic Surgery' (VIC section)



MR PETER CALLAN
INTERPLAST

Many plastic surgeons in Australia have volunteered to do two weeks with Interplast at some time or another. For some it's regular, for others it's occasional. My first trip was in 1997 to the Solomon Islands, and my other trips have been to Sri Lanka. Much of the work I have done has been related to microsurgical reconstruction such as breast reconstruction, or facial surgery for congenital problems such as cleft lip and palate, or trauma from burns.

The team consists of at least one nurse, an anaesthetist and two surgeons. We take boxes and boxes of equipment with us such as essential instruments, sutures, and dressings so as we don't impact on the availability of local supplies. The best part of the trips for me is working so closely with the highly skilled local surgeons in the countries we visit. We also liaise very carefully with them beforehand and while we are there, as well as the governments of the countries we visit, as it is extremely important to be sensitive to the effect your visit may have.

In the Solomons a 'forward team' went over before we arrived to spread the word that we were coming. One man travelled with his child for two days to get to us, partly by land, partly by boat.

I have found my trips extremely rewarding personally. A strong bond develops between team members and the medical personnel in the countries we visit, and the patient stories are extraordinary.

For more information on Mr Peter Callan see 'Peter Callan Plastic Surgeon' (VIC section)



DR MANSOOR MIRKAZEMI
INTERPLAST

When I finished medical school in Tasmania, I asked one of the plastic surgeons (Simon Thompson) who had just returned from an Interplast trip if I could go with him on his next trip. He said that only qualified plastic surgeons could participate. I couldn't wait to be involved.

I have been going to Sumbawa Besar in Indonesia for two weeks every year since 2009 with my colleague and mentor Dr Ian Carlisle, two anaesthetists and two nurses. There is only one general surgeon in Sumbawa who is unable to treat the large number of patients who require surgery. We have two Indonesian surgeons who join us for a week or two. This is a fantastic opportunity for us to exchange our experiences and learn new techniques as well as make new friends.

In two weeks we see about 250 patients and perform between 80 to 100 operations, involving cleft lips and palates, release of burn contractures, hand surgery, facial reconstruction after flesh-eating infections usually involving microsurgery, cancer removal and reconstruction, and some minor procedures. In terms of facilities and equipment, we are given two operating tables. Everything else we provide. The facilities are very basic, but we make things work and provide the same care we extend to our patients here in Australia. Local nurses get heavily involved in the work and help us in all aspects of patient care. They are supervised by our two Aussie nurses.

I escaped from my country due to persecution and came to Australia with my sister in the mid 1980s. I was helped by the Australian people to study and make a life for myself. I know what it means to be desperate and destitute and I highly value and appreciate what this country has provided for me. I see it as my duty and privilege to help others and make a difference in their lives, however small that might be. Interplast gives me an opportunity to use my skills, and bring happiness to so many people. It reminds me to focus my thoughts and efforts to what medicine is all about and the reason we are here on this earth: to make a positive impact on other people's lives and bring a smile to their faces.

For more information on Dr Mansoor Mirkazemi see 'Collins St Plastic Surgery' (VIC section)



MR YUGESH CAPLASH
OSSA

Initially my volunteer work started in India for Rotary International, repairing children's cleft lips and palates. I got introduced to OSSA by fellow surgeon Mark Moore who was doing trips to East and West Timor. I've been going to East Timor for three years now and there is still a considerable part of the population who have cleft lips and palates, many of them adults who have lived with it all of their lives.

Our trips usually are comprised of one nurse, one anaesthetist and one surgeon. We bring our own instruments and have managed to secure donations from suture companies. We examine new patients and follow up on patients that have had surgery on previous trips we made. We usually see an average of 40 patients a week, and probably operate on 30 in that time. It's a very busy time but we are now getting the chance to teach the local surgeons how to perform these surgeries, so the trips have become teaching visits now too.

It really does change people's lives when they have the surgery. Especially the children - you can see it in some of the parent's eyes, they feel so happy to see how completely their child's profile has changed.

For more information on Dr Yugesh Caplash see 'Advanced Plastic & Cosmetic Surgery' (SA section)



Interplast™

Repairing bodies & rebuilding lives in the Asia Pacific region

INTERPLAST AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND (INTERPLAST)

Interplast are a not-for-profit organisation working to improve the quality of life for people with disability who are disabled as a result of congenital or acquired medical conditions such as cleft lip and palate or burn scar contractures. Interplast sends fully qualified Australian and New Zealand volunteer plastic and reconstructive surgeons, anaesthetists, nurses and allied health professionals to the Asia Pacific region to provide free surgical treatment for patients who would otherwise not be able to afford access to such services. They also focus heavily on training local medical personnel to act independently. Their purpose is to provide life-changing surgery today and sustainable health systems tomorrow. Find out more at www.interplast.org.au



Overseas Surgical Specialists Association (OSSA)

The Overseas Specialist Surgeons of Australia (OSSA) came to being in the early 1990s through Dr John Hargrave, a respected leprosy specialist, hand and burns surgeon based in the Northern Territory who identified the need for reconstructive surgical services in neighbouring Eastern Indonesia.

Since its formation, OSSAA has, through the magnificent volunteering spirit of the doctors and nurses and the generosity of its members, supporters and medical suppliers (plus some government funding) continued to grow - the number of consultations and operations are now approaching 800 and 400 respectively per year. For reasons of continuity, trust, and local capacity building, OSSAA has maintained its focus in Flores, East and West Timor. Find out more at www.ossaainc.org.au