

The helping hands project

A team of surgeons from Australia has carried out reconstructive plastic surgery on a number of patients

Sonam Pelden

A 12-year old boy was brought to the hospital recently, after he was hit by a car and dragged for about 10-20m. The skin on the side of his face and ear had been scraped off, leaving behind a gaping wound.

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In another incident, a young hotel employee in Paro had suffered an electrical burn, which could have led her fingers to be amputated.

But when a team of surgeons from Interplast Australia along with doctors at the JDWNRH operated on her recently, she became the first patient to get a finger joint replacement in the country.

And after doing a 10 hour-long reconstructive plastic surgery on the 12-year-old, the doctors said the surgery was successful.

They are among some 60 patients that a seven-member team, including two plastic surgeons, has operated on since they arrived in the country last week.

Interplast is a not-for-profit organisation in Australia, which organises reconstructive plastic surgeries in developing countries in the Southeast Asia region. The team is now at the Mongar regional referral hospital.

Plastic and reconstructive surgeon, who led Interplast's first team to Bhutan, Dr Philip Griffin, said that, after his last visit in 2013, he felt that Bhutan needed to have some skills developed in reconstructive surgery, despite the surgeons doing all they can to help save lives.

"There are times when injuries cause tissue loss and, unless you have reconstructive skills, it can lead to loss of limbs, because infections set in," he said.

Dr Griffin said he had been trying reconstructive techniques for the head, face, body, arms and legs in Australia. "It's quite an honour to try and help your country," he said. "We are hoping to visit each year and

"Unfortunately, it's not just an operation, it's about helping the hands move after the operation"

Dr Philip Griffin
Plastic and
reconstructive surgeon/
Interplast team leader

with each visit we have been working with local surgeons so they can rebuild their skills and experience."

The team, which has also brought with them medical supplies and equipment, has seen patients across all age groups, who had suffered hand injuries, scarring from burns, motor vehicle accident cases, and those with lost contractual muscles.

Orthopaedic surgeon at the JDWNR hospital, Dr Sonam Dorji, said the team has been taking up complicated plastic and reconstructive surgeries that require micro surgery or tendon replacement. "Before, we used to do hand surgery but now we involve all surgical speciality because the main objective is to transfer technology and skills to health workers here."

The program for hand care in Bhutan began about six years ago, when a certified hand therapist, Suzanne Caragianis, visited the country and saw a need for hand care. Since then, through her helping hands project, Suzanne and her team have been helping in building the capacity of health workers in hand care.

"The hands are such an important part and it's actually a very delicate structure to repair," Dr Griffin said. "Unfortunately, it's not just an operation, it's about helping the hands move after the operation."

Suzanne Caragianis and the team she has trained at the hospital help patients move their hands again. They also



Bhim Bdr, who had injured his wrist in a fall tests his grip at the helping hands centre

make splints for patients and collect donations to buy specialised medical equipment for hand therapy.

One such patient is 37-year old Tashi Tangbi. An accident six years ago had left him with two broken fingers. He was operated on last week and has been seeing the therapist everyday. "There's progress and now I'm able to straighten my fingers a little," he said. "I'm thankful to the team for helping me move my fingers again."

Although it's not criti-

cal care, Suzanne Caragianis said hand care is important. "Hands are critical for function, for independence, self-esteem, prayer, getting your self dressed and eating and, in Bhutan, that's essential for survival," she said.

Over the last six years, the helping hands project has helped hundreds of patients to move their hands again. A memorandum of understanding between the health ministry and Interplast, Australia is expected to be signed soon.

Last December, farmer

Bhim Bdr from Dorokha Samtse had slipped and severely injured his right wrist when the wrist landed on the sickle's blade. "I went to BHU where they stitched my wrist but, due to infection, I was referred here," he said.

Bhim Bdr, 39, said he has been operated on seven times and was also referred to Ganga medical centre and hospital in Coimbatore, India. "My hand was dead; I couldn't hold anything," he said. "But, with the therapy, I can feel and I'm now able to move my hand."

Thousand butter lamps lit for late former MPs

Nirmala Pokhrel

Members of the National Assembly yesterday offered a thousand butter lamp and, prayers at the Kuenrey of Tashichhodzong for the two late former Members of the Parliament (MP).

Former Dophuchen-Tading MP Prahlad Gurung passed on February 27. He was 68 while the former Ge-

lephu MP Prem Kumar Gurung, 57, expired on April 4.

Prem Kumar Gurung has three children, while Prahlad Gurung has four.

Family members said they were ill for over six months.

A press release from the National Assembly stated that they had both personified everything that is good about political affairs during

their tenure as MPs.

"As we pay our tribute, we hope it will be a consolation to the bereaved families to know that both the late former MPs were respectable individuals," the press release stated.

Speaker Jigme Zangpo also handed over a Royal thukso of Nu 50,000 each, granted by His Majesty the King, to the family members.