



2024 Dharampur, India

TRIP REPORT

OUR STORY

Shrimad Rajchandra Hospital & Research Center Dharampur, Gujarat, India January 28 - February 2, 2024

Embracing the spirit of service and healing, Operation Medical embarked on its latest mission to Dharampur, a tranquil town nestled in the lush landscape of Gujarat, India. From January 28 to February 2, 2024, our dedicated team journeyed to this serene locale, renowned for its natural beauty and bountiful mango and chickoo fruit orchards. Dharampur, situated on the banks of the Swargavahini River, is enveloped by the Sahyadri or Western Ghats range, bestowing it with a pleasant climate and the title of "Cherrapunji of Gujarat" for its abundant rainfall.

While living in an area with such great natural beauty, for many, daily life is not as easy or bountiful. Within Gujarat, where more than 50 million people reside, there are 29 main tribes of people living a simple lifestyle in their local villages, in homes commonly constructed of bamboo, clay, wooden poles, paddy grass, and other natural elements. Many live day-to-day without wearing any shoes or coverings on their feet, even when they may be traveling for miles. Some of the common occupations include rickshaw pullers, farmers, basket weavers and sellers, mill and press workers, and other agricultural jobs.

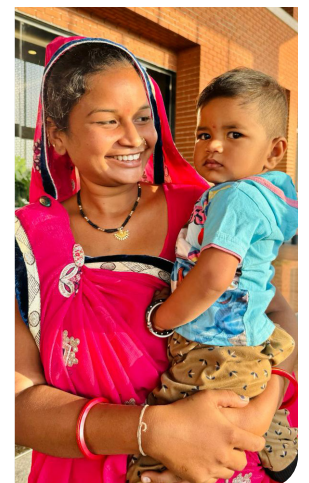
THE PLACE:

The average annual income in South Gujarat is slightly less than \$3,000 (USD), while farmers and others working in those tribal locations whom our team treated during the mission, typically make even less.

With many people engaging in manual labor for their livelihoods, physical health can be paramount to successfully providing for their families. A few of the common medical conditions in this area of the world include things like skin infections and diseases, sickle cell anemia, malnutrition, and thyroid conditions. This can be attributed to their way of life, their daily work demands, air quality, general nutrition, and more.

To provide care for those in this region, our team partnered with the Shrimad

Rajchandra Hospital & Research Center, a 250-bed facility that stands as a testament to compassionate care and medical excellence in rural India. The hospital maintains their mission to provide high-quality healthcare free of cost or at highly subsidized rates to the underprivileged tribal communities of South Gujarat. Their mission provides the basis for a truly synergistic relationship with Operation Medical. Our collaboration with the hospital allowed us to bring medical care to those in dire need, bridging the gap between global quality healthcare and local accessibility.



OUR STORY:

Embarking on a mission to Dharampur, Gujarat, our team of 22 volunteers came together from Pennsylvania, Florida, New York, Arizona, and California to contribute their skills at Shrimad Rajchandra Hospital. Upon arrival at the Mumbai airport after several hours in the air, the team was transported via car and driver to Dharampur, a journey of more than five hours due to traffic and local conditions. Upon arrival at the hospital, the team began an immediate dive into patient consultations, setting a purposeful tone for the mission ahead.

Our team was grateful to work alongside many talented professionals at the hospital, as all were focused on providing the best quality healthcare for the patients seeking free, and necessary, medical treatment. During the week, the team completed a total of 89 procedures, consisting of 47 men and 42 women between the ages of 19 through 77. The most common procedures performed during the week were hernia repairs, kidney stone treatments, and hysterectomies. The team also had the honor of performing a few collaborative surgeries with the local SRH physicians, utilizing the strengths of each individual surgeon to provide the best possible care for those patients.

In support of the work our team was doing was the local group of Jainists, who provided our lodging, accommodations, and meals for the week. They even welcomed our volunteers into their Dharampur Ashram, a place of spiritual refuge and serene beauty. Stepping aside from the bustling energy and long days at the hospital, our team had the esteemed pleasure of meeting some of the Jain leaders, including Pujya Gurudevshri Rakeshbhai, and participating in a traditional ceremony. Jainism, one of the oldest religions in India, encourages respect and gentleness towards all living creatures.

Reflecting on our time in Dharampur, it is the bonds that were formed, the shared stories, the learning that occurred across both medical teams, and the joint effort to ease suffering which stand out the most. We could not have managed this trip were it not for the coordination team in India, including Mr. Devang Gada, Dr. Bijal Desai, Dr. Sohini Sheth, and Dr. Nishit, who ensured seamless logistics

and patient care, laying the groundwork for our collective success. This mission has demonstrated volunteerism, compassion, and the lasting impact of global healthcare through collaboration.



VOLUNTEER REFLECTIONS:

Karmae Amsbaugh
Surgical Technologist
Wellspan York Hospital/NeuroSurgical Team

I was introduced to Operation Medical by one of my co-workers at the time, who was a co-founder of Operation Medical. She had tried to get me to join the team on several surgical missions and I always declined. I finally agreed to go with the team in 2018. I made the trip, but she did not due to her tragic death just one month prior to our surgical mission. In addition to other mission trips I've participated in through other organizations, I am on my 8th mission with Operation Medical, 5 of which were to India. I can still hear her tell me that I will love it and I will get "hooked." Her words have been so true.

I enjoy each mission because it is like a "family reunion." We meet up with other team members from across the country that we have been on missions with in the past. Several times I have met up with old co-workers and now our paths are crossing after many years. We see our friends that live in India and we have worked alongside of on past missions. And of course, with each trip, we meet new team members and quickly grow a bond.

So often we take our blessings for granted that we have at home. We complain about our working conditions, our long hours and of course, our salary. Not once have I ever heard anyone complain about any of those things. I enjoy working alongside the local staff, learning the way they function in their operating room and I try to pass on some of my 44 years of surgical experience. Just as I learn from them, I hope to leave some of my skills and knowledge with them, too. When I return back to work, for a period of time, I am humbled and very appreciative for everything I have here.

I am blessed to be a part of Operation Medical Surgical Team, serve on the Board of Directors, but most of all, I serve on the Logistics Committee alongside of 3 of the best and most dedicated ladies I know. To quote one of those ladies, "team work makes the dream work." This could not be more true.



Dr. Andrew Richards
Colon and Rectal Surgeon
UPMC Central Pennsylvania

For one week, I had the pleasure of immersing myself in the vibrant culture of Dharampur, India while providing much-needed medical care to its people. My first mission trip with Operation Medical was in 2018 when we traveled to Rwanda. The arrival of Covid across the world delayed several Op Med trips; I am very happy to have been able to participate again this year.

Team members were welcomed with open arms into the homes and daily lives of locals, sharing meals and stories that bridged the gap between strangers and friends. I also enjoyed renewing friendships with many team members who worked with me in Rwanda and meeting new participants whom I hope to meet within the near future.

I come from a long line of medical care professionals dating back to the 1880s. It was a time when medical care was provided to anyone in need without insurance considerations or the ability to pay. Our mission was just a drop in the ocean, but it serves as a potent reminder of what we can achieve through the power of humanity.

I cannot say enough about Dr. Mukul Parikh, our calm and cool trip leader, who managed to sort out the many demands without losing his sense of humor. His dedication to the Op Med cause is remarkable to me and I am grateful for the time we spent working together.



Dr Uma Parekh
Pediatric Anesthesiologist
Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center, Hershey, PA

I want to express my utmost gratitude to Operation Medical for giving me this opportunity to join this mission in Dharampur. I have been attending surgical mission trips with Operation Medical since 2014, though this one at Dharampur has been the most fulfilling. It was definitely the teamwork that made the dream work. The icing on the cake was the superb level of hospitality from our host, SRMD hospital.

It was amazing to see that the local staff, in spite of being so talented and revered, are so respectful and disciplined; always cheerfully ready to help us out in what we need. It was wonderful to see the use of neuraxial anesthesia, which cuts down the cost and time of anesthesia dramatically. They are simple people; it doesn't take much to make them happy.

And of course, what makes the long days' work worth it is when the patients tell you how good they feel, not only with the treatment they received but the way in which we communicate with them. At every mission, there are patients who tell us a lot of their pain is relieved simply by the way we talk to them.

Last but not least, the bonding that I experienced with these talented professionals in just a few days is amazing. It is probably because everyone is selflessly working to serve. I will happily continue to serve on these missions as long as I can.



**PATIENT STORY #1 - SHARMILA BEN
MASTECTOMY, DR. KATHERINE JACKSON**

Living in the quiet town of Dharampur, 8 kilometers from the nearest hospital, Sharmila Ben, a 46-year-old female, faced a daunting challenge when she was first diagnosed with breast cancer last fall. Concerned about the financial burden of the surgery, she and her family hesitated to proceed with the recommended treatment. Sharmila Ben and her husband, Harish Bhai, have nurtured their family, raising two children, a son, Hiralkumar, and a daughter, Pratiksha, while managing a cattle farming business.



They began to feel hopeful when they learned about the free medical camp at Shrimad Rajchandra Mission Dharampur Hospital. Sharmila Ben decided to seek the help she needed. Her dedicated family supported

her throughout her journey, including her husband, son, niece Jaimini, and sisters-in-law, Amitaben and Nainaben. Dr. Katherine Jackson from Operation Medical performed a successful mastectomy for Sharmila Ben on January 30, 2024, in order to help improve her health outcomes.



She is grateful to have received this treatment from Dr. Jackson and her team of providers, including both Shrimad Rajchandra Hospital personnel in addition to Dr. Sejal Shah, Laura Amsbaugh, Brenda Cline, and Daniel Nassar from Operation Medical. Sharmila Ben's successful surgery, skillfully performed by the medical team at the camp, is not just a personal triumph over her health challenges. It also underscores the critical role of community healthcare initiatives like Operation Medical & Shrimad Rajchandra Hospital & Research Center in providing essential services to those in need, ensuring that financial constraints do not hinder access to life-saving treatments.

**PATIENT STORY #2 - BHAYAJIBHAI BHIKHALUBHAI SAMBAR
SOFT TISSUE EXCISION - LEFT ARM
DR. CHARLES CLINE & DR. KATHERINE JACKSON**

On a beautiful hilltop in rural West India, Mr. Bhayajibhai Bhikhalubhai Sambar and his children lead a simple life as farmers. 15 years ago, Mr. Sambar began to notice a growth on his left arm. Over time, this growth became quite large and burdensome, making daily life and work on the farm challenging. Recently, the situation grew dire as the growth burst open, prompting them to seek medical treatment.



Sambar embarked on the long journey to the hospital, accompanied by his son, Vijay, and his daughter, Sharu. A friend gave them a ride to the bus stop on his rickshaw, since their home is 20 miles away. Immediately thereafter, a three-hour bus ride brought them to the outskirts of the city. The hospital then arranged to pick them up from there.

Under the skilled hands of Dr. Charles Cline & Dr. Katherine Jackson, along with support from Sue Miller, Dr. Sejal Shah, and several Shrimad Rajchandra team members, Mr. Sambar underwent a successful soft tissue excision. He is now able to look forward to healing, greater use of his left arm, and a life free of the pain and limitations he endured for many years. Seeing the results of the surgery, his family shared their radiant smiles with the team and a great appreciation for the work that was done.

**PATIENT STORY #3 - CUMULATIVE STORY HIGHLIGHTING 7 THYROID PATIENTS
THYROIDECTOMIES & HEMITHYROIDECTOMIES
MULTIPLE OP MED SURGEONS**

Thyroid issues, a concern affecting the body's endocrine system, have been on the rise in India over the past several years. Found in the neck, the thyroid gland produces a variety of hormones, critical to the proper function of many body systems. One of the causes of thyroid and other health issues is a lack of sufficient iodine in our diets, a problem endemic to India.

Thyroid disorders now affect around 42 million Indians, many of whom do not have access to the necessary treatment. These include hyperthyroidism, hypothyroidism, thyroiditis, and even thyroid cancers. Many people develop thyroid masses, or thyroid nodules, which can occur without any other symptoms at all. However, in many cases, as they grow larger, they can cause difficulty breathing and swallowing, tightness in the neck and sometimes a chronic cough.

As you can see in the photos of Rupliben Ukhadbhai Janjar, a 56-year-old woman from a local village, her swelling has gone untreated for quite some time. By removing the mass and performing a hemithyroidectomy, Dr. Charles Cline and his team were able to greatly reduce her discomfort and improve her overall quality of life.

During the mission week at Shrimad Rajchandra Hospital, the Operation Medical team treated 7 patients with thyroid conditions. Several masses were removed, the largest measuring 12 cm. Our team of Operation Medical Surgeons, Anesthesiologists, and additional clinical staff were honored to be able to assist each and every patient treated for this condition.



SUPPORT STAFF

While clinical volunteers get much of the spotlight, it is important to note that our mission's success is a result of many non-clinical volunteers as well. Behind the scenes of the OR and PACU are some very diligent, busy individuals...keeping track of patient data for Op Med Records, taking photos so that we can share our works with social media through trip reports and annual reports. The non-clinical staff also oversees logistical matters, keeping the inventory of supplies straight and ready for deployment to the surgical teams.

Thank you to all of our support volunteers that play a vital role in mission success.

CASES BY GENDER:

Female – 42
Male - 47

CASES BY AGE:

Youngest – 19-years old
Oldest – 77-years-old

CASES BY TYPE:

- Cholecystectomy
- Exam Under Anesthesia
- Excision of Cyst/Mass/Scar
- Fistulotomy/Fistulectomy
- Hemorrhoidectomy
- Hernia Repair
- Hydrocele Repair
- Hysterectomy
- Kidney Stone Treatment
- Prostate Surgery
- Repair Rectal Prolapse
- Sphincterotomy
- Thyroidectomy
- Ureter Treatment

The Team

Surgeons

Charles Cline, MD
Katherine Jackson, MD
Parul Krishnamurthy Iyer, MD
Andrew Richards, MD
Galaxy Shah, MD

Anesthesia

Sue Miller, CRNA
Mukul Parikh, MD
(Trip Leader)
Uma Parekh, MD
Sejal Shah, MD

Nurses

Laura Mae Amsbaugh, RN
Dori O’Neill, RN
Dinkal Patel, RN
Bonnie Pepper, RN

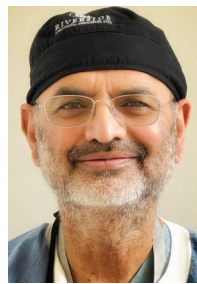
Support

Brenda Cline
Krishna Iyer
Margaret Marchaterre
Daniel Nassar
Aaditya Shah
Pinky Shah
Smaran Teru

Surgical Technologists

Karmae Amsbaugh
Crystal Newcomer

Team Reflections



**Team Leader/Coordinator
Dr. Mukul Parikh**

Four years after initial contact and 18 months after the opening of a very well-equipped SRM Hospital in a rural area of tribal Inhabitants, our mission finally came to fruition. This was one of the best missions in Operation Medical history as far as the quality of equipment and supplies, staff support, and overall arrangements including superb room and board. We ended up operating on more involved and complex cases resulting in lower case numbers than some of our previous surgical missions. The volunteer team of 21 participants gelled very well, working in unison with each other and the local staff. The SRM Hospital has proven to be a great choice to revisit and offer services in the future.



Special Thanks

Our special thanks to Mr. Abhay Jasani for initial contact and orientation of SRM hospital; Dr. Bijalben Mehta for coordination during the past year for negotiations and finalizing the mission; Dr. Sohini Sheth for case selection and Operations during the entire mission week and Devang Gada for the logistics of transportation and accommodations of our team.



Operation Medical is thankful for all of the participants and welcomes them to join us for another camp. Please check our website at www.operationmedical.com to see how you can get involved in providing global healthcare.