



2025  
Surat,  
India

TRIP REPORT

## OUR STORY

### Surat, Gujarat, India January 19-23, 2025

In preparation for this mission, Operation Medical assembled a team of 16 volunteers to travel to the city of Surat. While we had previously visited different locations within the state, this was our first medical/surgical mission in Surat. The planning had been taking place for several months prior to our teams' departure, as we were learning more about the Shree Prannath Hospital, where we would be treating patients during our mission week.

Our team members traveled from Pennsylvania, New York, New Hampshire, Arizona, Indiana, and we even had three volunteers join us from overseas. One volunteer who now resides in New Zealand, is originally from India, as well as the other 2 Indian volunteers who joined our efforts. All 3 of these nurses had been a part of the efforts

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## THE PLACE:

As you make your way through the city of Surat, you experience an onslaught of sensory stimulation. The vibrant colors found in everyone's clothing, on the buildings, throughout the shops, and even on the vehicles are brilliant. Smells of various street vendors and their offerings mix with the smell of the city and the smog. Rubbing shoulders with others in the streets is common as the population is just under 7 million people bustling about this 126-square mile city. In comparison, New York City has 8 million people within 300 square miles.

Despite being an economic powerhouse, Surat has a stark economic divide. In the state of Gujarat, approximately 16.52% of the population lives below the poverty line, while in urban areas, such as Surat, about

10.14% of residents (around 700,000 people) are below the poverty line.

The prioritization of caring for their family in combination with financial constraints lead approximately half of all families to co-exist in their small, shared homes. The average shared household income for those living below the poverty line is reported to be approximately 1,842 Indian Rupees per month, equivalent to \$21.00 USD.

This prominent city in Gujarat, India, is known for its thriving diamond and textile industries. Many laborers in these industries earn meager wages and lack health insurance, leaving them vulnerable to financial crises due to medical expenses. Migrant workers, a significant portion of

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## THE PLACE:

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the city's population, often live in poor conditions with limited access to basic healthcare services. Government healthcare facilities are overburdened, and private hospitals are often beyond the financial reach of the economically weaker sections.

Surat faces numerous health challenges, particularly among low-income and marginalized communities. Respiratory diseases are prevalent due to industrial pollution, while waterborne illnesses arise from poor sanitation in overcrowded slums, where we learned many of our patients lived. Malnutrition, maternal health issues, and infectious diseases also remain major concerns for the people living in this region. Access to healthcare is limited in underprivileged areas, where residents struggle with affordability and availability of medical facilities. Language barriers and lack of awareness further hinder healthcare accessibility. Many rely on traditional healing practices instead of modern medicine, delaying necessary treatment. The need for teams like that of Operation Medical are great in this area, to provide necessary medical treatment for those who are unable to access that care.

## OUR STORY:

*continued from page 1*

of Operation Medical on prior missions to their home towns and wanted to join in and help us again this time around. The great diversity of our team, coming from many different locations and having a variety of specialties provided us with a wealth of knowledge and expertise to serve our patients here in Surat.

For the majority of those who reside in the United States, departure flights left on Thursday, January 16th. After a flight of 14 hours or more to the Mumbai Airport, the team then relied on our gracious hosts to help them get the rest of the way to our destination. Located more than 170 miles from the airport, the bumpy drive was a lengthy one, up to 7 hours one way when taking into account the congested traffic. Even with some last-minute changes in flights, the team all safely arrived in Surat in waves and got settled into our hotel, located very near Shree Prannath Hospital.

Some volunteers who arrived earlier than others had an opportunity to explore the city for just a bit on Saturday. Our hosts were kind enough to show us around and give us some information about the local people and places. Prior to the start of the scheduled surgeries on Sunday, January 19, 2025, the team was also formally welcomed with a ceremony. This provided an excellent springboard to remind the team of the great need in this area and why we were there.

Our mission was to provide the needed specialized care for those who lack regular medical access. Additionally, collaborating with local healthcare providers allowed us the opportunity to enhance their long-term healthcare solutions. The surgical camp officially commenced early on Sunday morning and continued through the end of the week. During that time, our volunteer team, which was composed of 3 surgical teams, Our PACU team and additional support volunteers, were able to successfully complete 86 total procedures. Cases varied from hernia repairs to hysterectomies to lipoma and cyst removals, and more. You can learn more about the procedures and the grateful patients the team was able to help throughout the remainder of this trip report.





### PATIENT STORY #1 - LILABEN S. DR. ANDY RICHARDS

It was a true honor for our team to meet Lilaben, a 60-year-old woman with a vibrant history. Married at just ten years old, she moved out of her family's home and went to live with her husband. While not practiced any longer, at the time this was quite common in the region. She and her husband had two sons and one daughter over the years, and now the couple enjoys the laughter and love of their eight grandchildren.



The entire family lives together. Lilaben is a member of the Maratha Cast from Maharashtra state. Throughout most of her life, Lilaben has been a housekeeper, providing for her family and others in the community. The income she brings in, plus that of her husband and three adult children amounts to approximately 30,000 rupees, the equivalent of approximately \$347.00 USD. While they do benefit from both water and electricity in their home, they live on a very tight budget without extra money for luxuries.

For the last 22 years, Lilaben has suffered from pain caused by her lipoma, a benign tumor. She has not had the financial ability to pay for treatment, so this camp was the perfect solution for her. She learned of the camp from her son, who works at the hospital. Dr. Andy

Richards worked together with Dr. Uma Parekh to provide Lilaben with the relief she was seeking by performing a successful lipoma excision procedure.



### PATIENT STORY #2 - JALPA K. DR. JOHN EICHENLAUB



Our team had the esteemed pleasure of meeting and getting to know Jalpa, a 42-year-old woman from Surat. Jalpa lives at home with her son, a science student and her daughter, in her 2nd year at Prabhu BCA College. Her husband of 22 years is the main provider for the family, working as a painter and construction worker. They all keep Jalpa quite busy maintaining the home and supporting her family's needs.

She enjoys motivating her family and others in her community so they can also be successful and find joy in their own lives. Jalpa cares for her personal health by engaging



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**PATIENT STORY #2 - JALPA K.  
DR. JOHN EICHENLAUB**
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in regular exercise and is also dedicated to her yoga practice as well. She is also dedicated to a 5:00 am meditation practice for her own wellbeing.

During her time at the surgical camp, she underwent both a hysterectomy and salpingectomy to resolve the inflammatory disease she had been afflicted with. PID can cause chronic pain and damage to internal organs. Dr. John Eichenlaub worked together with Dr. Sejal Shah to ensure the success of this surgery and provide Jalpa with the best possible

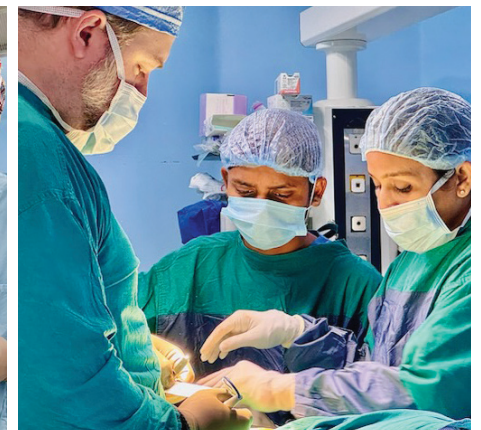
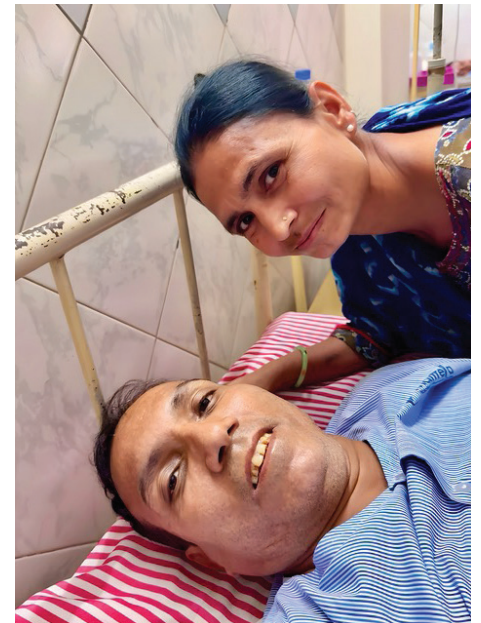
outcome. This surgery will allow her not only to be more comfortable and free of pain, but to continue to support both her family and others in her community as she feels called to do.


**PATIENT STORY #3 - NATVARBHAI V.  
DR. KYLE PACKER**

Our team had the immense pleasure of meeting Natvar, a jovial Hindi gentleman who lives within walking distance of this hospital. Natvar was accompanied by his wife, Natkabhai. After growing up near each other, they married 16 years ago and now have 2 children, ages 13 and 15. He entertained our team with his sense of humor and friendly personality. He told us that his favorite food is Chinese, which he thinks is quite humorous and was happy to share a laugh about that. He also told us that for fun, they love to go to the cinema. Natvar works during the day as a diamond cutter in order to provide for his family and pay the rent for their apartment.

Unfortunately, Natvar has been dealing with a few health issues recently, including challenges with poor oral health. Due to the high cost of care at many of the other hospitals, he has not been able to receive the care he has needed. His visit to Shree Prannath this week was prompted by worsening symptoms from his hernia. He saw the advertisements for the surgical camp and jumped at the opportunity to receive free care.

On Wednesday, Dr. Kyle Packer and his surgical team brought Natvarbhai into the Operating Room in order to perform a hernia repair. After a successful procedure, he was able to recover quickly and then was discharged to return home with his family. He is looking forward to returning to his normal activities after he is fully healed from the surgery.



## VOLUNTEER REFLECTIONS:

**Dr. Sejal J. Shah, MD***Anesthesiologist**Regional Anesthesia and Acute Pain Fellow at IU*

I am grateful to have been able to join Operation Medical for my second mission trip in Surat. The local hospital staff at Shree Prannath Hospital were very welcoming and were a pleasure to work with. The local anesthesiologist, Dr. Pinal Bhikadiya, oriented us to their anesthesia equipment, and was a great sounding board while practicing in a resource-limited setting.

During our week-long trip, we were able to provide surgical and anesthetic care to patients from underserved areas. I had the pleasure of working alongside Dr. John Eichenlaub, who performed several total hysterectomies while we were in Surat. The majority of these operations were performed under spinal anesthesia and sedation. It was heartwarming to see the genuine gratitude expressed by our patients throughout the week.

The experience at Surat was a great reminder of the disparity in healthcare that exists not just between countries, but within each country itself. It challenged us to work with the medications and equipment we had available, while striving to provide the safest and most effective patient care. I am thankful for my experience in Surat and for the wonderful Operation Medical group. I look forward to my next mission trip!

**Dr. Kyle Packer, DO***General Surgeon**Baptist Health*

I was given the unique opportunity to become part of an Operation Medical team to India during surgical residency in 2016, largely in part to Diana Davidson. This took our team to a very tribal area of India that really lacked any of the medical care that we are all used to in the U.S. Cows wandering the dirt roads and long lines of patients were waiting while we performed surgical procedures with minimal equipment and sterile environments.

Since that amazing experience, I have completed five medical trips on three continents. This recent trip to Surat, India in January 2025 was my fourth trip with Operation Medical and my first trip since COVID. I was so excited when I was given the opportunity to join this surgical mission group once again.

Being a part of the Operation Medical team is always an incredible and rewarding experience. This trip, while also in India, was at a small hospital with formal surgical rooms and standard admissions and local doctors and staff. It never ceases to amaze me regarding the cohesiveness of the team, not only amongst themselves but with the local staff. Many of the team members have never met each other before, but are able to function like a well-oiled machine that has been together for many years to improve the quality of so many individuals' lives. The hospitality of the local staff is incredible and they accept us with open arms, as if we had been part of their team for years. The bonds and friendships that were made within just a few days will last a lifetime.

I cannot thank Operation Medical and all individuals involved enough for their dedication behind the scenes to allow me to serve those in need. I strongly encourage anyone with interest to reach out for more information about upcoming opportunities. I personally cannot wait until I have another opportunity to help in underserved countries.

**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 oversee 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.**



## Special Thanks



**Dr. Dinesh Pandit**

We were initially connected to this Shree Prannath Hospital through a long-time supporter of Operation Medical, Dr. Dinesh Pandit. Operation Medical's Team Leader and

President, Dr. Mukul Parikh worked closely with Dr. Pandit as well as other hospital representatives to plan the logistics of the mission and coordinate patient cases in preparation for our trip. Dr. Pranav Thaker and Avichal Kumar also played critical roles in our successful mission here, from the early planning stages up through completion of the mission.

We would like to thank our gracious hosts for all of the planning, time, resources, and kindness provided to our team of volunteers. From the moment the team touched down in Mumbai, the incredible host team went out of their way to take care of every need. From the hotel accommodations to the meals provided, to the transportation, they took care of it all and did so with a smile.

We also want to take a moment to thank the Kunkel Foundation, which provided Operation Medical with a significant grant in support of our 2024-2025 medical missions. This was a substantial help to cover the costs of supplies, financial assistance for our medical volunteers, as well as other expenses incurred during the mission. The Kunkel Foundation is a non-profit organization located in Central PA, supporting the local community and beyond.

This outpouring of support allowed the team to focus their energies on the task at hand - providing the greatest possible care to as many patients as possible during our time in Surat.

## Team Reflections

**Team Leader - Mukul Parikh, MD**



our serious consideration.

Our first ever mission to Shree Prannath Hospital in Surat was a success by any measure. A year worth of communications and preparation led to a very well organized and executed camp by the hosts. It was a small team of volunteers that worked efficiently to perform some difficult cases with the limited resources available. The local staff was cooperative and friendly. The hosts would like us to come back for another mission in a couple years and would certainly merit



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MEDICAL™**

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## CASES BY GENDER:

Female – 39

Male - 47

## CASES BY AGE:

Youngest – 10 years old

Oldest – 75 years old

## CASES BY TYPE:

Abdominal Hysterectomy - 8

Anal Fistulectomy - 1

Circumcision - 3

Excision of Anal Fissure - 3

Hemorrhoidectomy - 1

Hernia Repair - 39

Hydrocelectomy - 1

Hysterectomy - 1

Laparoscopic Appendectomy - 1

Lipoma Excision - 6

Neck Swelling Excision - 1

Polypectomy - 1

Repair of Epigastric Hernia - 1

Tonsil & Adenoid Resection - 1

Tonsillectomy - 6

Total Laparoscopic Hysterectomy - 3

Vaginal Hysterectomy - 4

## THE TEAM

### Team Leader

Dr. Mukul Parikh

### Surgeons

Dr. John Eichenlaub

Dr. Kyle Packer

Dr. Andy Richards

### Anesthesia

Dr. Uma Parekh

Dr. Mukul Parikh

Dr. Neelima Parikh

Dr. Olivera Quitkin

Dr. Sejal Shah

### Nurses/Surgical Techs:

Karmae Amsbaugh, CST

Laura Brennan, RN

Christine Otto, RN

Disha Patel, RN

Bhakti Pillai, RN

Bhavu Tailor, RN

### Support

Beverly Flowers

Margaret Marchaterre