



# Canada-Guyana Outreach Mission

## *Health Care for Guyana*

### 2017 REPORT

#### **FEBRUARY TRIP TO GUYANA**

2017 was a very busy year for Canada-Guyana Outreach Mission (CanGO). In February, I traveled to Guyana to conclude some unfinished business with the Guyana Revenue Agency and to make dental arrangements for the children who will be having surgery in March 2018. At that time I took the opportunity to visit the Ministry of Public Health, the Diaspora Unit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Prime Minister's office where I discussed the many challenges we were experiencing while trying to organize the annual mission.

#### **VISIT WITH THE FIRST LADY**



The day before I returned to Canada, I was very fortunate to meet with the First Lady, Mrs. Sandra Granger at State House. The First Lady mentioned her concerns about the Indigenous Peoples including:

- a) High rate of teen pregnancy
- b) High rate of HIV
- c) Teen mothers who do not know how to care for their children
- d) VIA testing (screening for cervical cancer)

I reported CanGO's accomplishments on previous missions and assured Mrs. Granger that we will continue VIA and STD (sexually transmitted diseases) testing in October 2017.

#### **AWARD FROM THE GUYANA CULTURAL ASSOCIATION OF NEW YORK**

Members of CanGO were very honoured to accept the 2017 Guyana Cultural Association (GCA) Award in recognition of our community service in Guyana. Needless to say, we are very appreciative of the acknowledgement of our work with the Indigenous Peoples of Guyana. We're also grateful to Cyril Bryan (who has been following us for many years) for nominating us for this prestigious award. A few of our members were at the Awards Banquet in New York on August 30 where I accepted the award on behalf of CanGO.



GCA Award being presented to me by Consul General Barbara Atherly and Ronald Lammy, Chair of the GCA Awards Committee



GCA Award

## PRE-MISSION VISITS BY THE ORGANIZING TEAM

On October 9, Conrad Joseph, Marlene (Annie) Joseph and Yvonne Joseph Triesman, all members of the Organizing Team of the CanGO, left Toronto for Guyana. As is customary, our task was to finalize arrangements for the upcoming mission.

### WEEK 1

#### Developmental/Mental Health Group



On October 21, Ms. Winifred Coddett (Social Worker), Ms. Paula Holla (Physiotherapist), Dr. Clare Mitchell (Developmental Pediatrician), Ms. Emily Needles (Data Entry Clerk) and Ms. Jillian Johnston (a representative from “Days for Girls”) arrived in Guyana. They were welcomed at the airport by Mr. Denroy Tudor and Ms. Joyce Nurse from the Ministry of Public Health and escorted through the VIP line. Without delay, the bags of medication for the mission were then cleared through Customs and everyone was transported to Project DAWN in Liliendaal by two Ministry of Public Health vehicles. They were joined by Dr. Lloyd Stoll (Dentist) and Ms. Patricia Stoll (Dental Assistant) who

had arrived earlier that week, and by two local health professionals: Ms. Kesharie Courtman (Community Health Worker) and Mr. Patrick Fung (Echocardiographer).

This team worked for two weeks and performed specialized Developmental Pediatric/Mental Health (Dev/MH) clinics in Region 1 at the Kumaka District Hospital, Waramuri Health Clinic, and the Karaburi Health Post, and in Region 2 at Warakaba for patients from Karawab and St. Monica, at the Kabakaburi Health Clinic and at the Oscar Joseph District Hospital. In coordination with the local health centres, nursing and midwife staff, and Toshihos, patients of all ages with delays in development and/or problems with behavior, emotional or mental health were assessed. Medical conditions seen by the Dev/MH team include: intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, hearing impairment, language delays, sequelae of prematurity, degenerative disorders, congenital malformations, autism, anxiety, depression and difficulties within the family and other relationships.

### WEEK 2

#### Remaining Members of CanGO Arrive

On October 28, the remaining members of the CanGO team arrived in Guyana. They were: Dr. David Alsobrook (Family Physician), Ms. Chandra Chunilall (Nurse), Dr. Joyce Dobbertin (Family Physician), Dr. Anne Galante (Gynecologist), Dr. Veronika Jedlovszky (Pulmonologist/General Internist), Ms. Heather McAlister (Nurse) Mr. Robert McKenzie (Nurse), Ms. Linnet Mohabeer (Nurse), Dr. Denise Niemira (Family Physician), Dr. Mitra Persaud (Pediatrician/Allergist), Ms. Nancy Persaud (Nurse) and Ms. Janna Schroder (Nurse). This group was also met at the airport by Mr. Denroy Tudor and Ms. Joyce Nurse, expediently cleared through Customs, and transported to Project DAWN in Liliendaal by minibus, compliments of the Ministry of Public Health. Mr. Sharir Chan, Chief Operating Officer of the Guyana Medical Relief (GMR), also joined this team.



The team was divided into two (2) groups: Group 1 held clinics at Warakaba for patients from Karawab, St. Monica, Kabakaburi and Akawini. Group 2 worked at the Kumaka District Hospital in Santa Rosa, Waramuri Health Centre, Manawarin Health Post and the Karaburi Health Post (all health centres in Region 1).

### **HEALTH CONCERNS ENCOUNTERED**

During the mission, **860** patients were seen and treated by our physicians. Problems presented to the team in Week 2 included respiratory tract infections, diabetes, hypertension, skin rashes, tuberculosis, back pain, worms, asthma, abdominal pain, diarrhea, UTI, vaginitis, seizures, STDs, typhoid, conjunctivitis, and GERD. The teams were able to make specific recommendations for treatment in the community, and referrals were made to the appropriate health facility for additional treatment.

### **URGENT INTERVENTION:**

#### **Tuberculosis (TB):**

Again this year the team encountered two (2) families with tuberculosis (TB). These families were immediately referred to the Ministry of Public Health and the Regional Health Officers for immediate attention.

### **CLEFT LIP AND PALATE SURGERY:**

As was reported last year, five (5) children with cleft lip and palate who presented to our Dev/MH team were referred to an American team and accepted for surgery. This surgery is currently scheduled for March 2018 at the GPHC. During the first week of this year's mission, five (5) additional children presented to the Dev/MH team with the same condition. These children will be referred to the American team as well with the hope that they too will receive surgery in March 2018. The Ministry of Indigenous Peoples Affairs has promised to provide accommodation for these young patients and their parents while they are in Georgetown.

### **VISIT TO THE NEWAMSTERDAM SCHOOL FOR SPECIAL CHILDREN:**

The United Women for Special Children (UWFSC) has been in existence since 1987. Their main focus is fund raising to assist the special needs schools, and lobbying for rights of children with special needs. One of the major issues faced by the special schools is the lack of related specialists to provide care for these children. In early summer, we were contacted by UWFSC to determine if it would be possible for us to visit the school in New Amsterdam and assist in whatever way we could.

On November 2, the Dev/MH team travelled to the New Amsterdam School for Special Children. This is a highly specialized school for children with a variety of disorders including Down Syndrome, Hearing Impairment, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Intellectual Disability and others. The team was very impressed with the school and staff. All teachers are proficient at American Sign Language, and all students have a specialized and individualized program. After graduation, students are often employed by the school. It is a very inclusive environment, and in contrast to many other areas in Guyana, children with a wide variety of developmental disabilities are able to attend and receive an education. The team provided consultations to school staff and to parents. They also provided consultation for children attending a nearby special school. Upon leaving, the team donated a volleyball net and balls to the school for their physical education and recreational program.

**AUDIOLOGY TESTING:**

The Dev/MH team provided hearing tests for patients of all ages (including infants and nonverbal individuals) who presented with concerns about hearing and/or language development. The team brought hearing aids which were donated to the Audiology Departments in Charity and Santa Rosa and to the New Amsterdam School for Special Children. In collaboration with the local Audiology Departments, hearing aids and batteries were also provided directly to several patients with identified hearing impairment.

**CARDIAC ASSESSMENTS:**

Non-invasive cardiac testing, in the form of echocardiograms and electrocardiograms, was performed on patients with known cardiac conditions, especially congenital, and also on patients with acute chest pain and shortness of breath. This was a collaborative effort between the Dev/MH team and the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) Echo Lab. The echocardiographer, Mr. Patrick Fung, received his training in Guyana and at the Libin Cardiovascular Institute of Alberta under the supervision of Dr. Debra Isaac. A total of fifty eight (58) echocardiograms and ten (10) electrocardiograms were performed in remote villages on patients of all ages. Four (4) patients were observed to have atrial septal defects (ASD), two (2) were observed to have ventricular septal defects (VSD) and one (1) was observed to have congenitally transposition of the great arteries (L-TGA). This is a service which patients would otherwise not receive unless they have the funds to travel to Georgetown.

**TESTING FOR CERVICAL CANCER:**

According to the 2015 Cancer Surveillance Report, the second leading cause of cancer deaths recorded by the Guyana Ministry of Public Health is cervical cancer. Over a 10-year period in Guyana, collected data revealed that cervical cancer accounted for 1,014 deaths. Keen efforts are being made by the Ministry to address this form of cancer. Sadly, younger women in the 15-39 year age group have the highest incidence (18% of cases). One of the strategic tactics being embraced by the Ministry is the Visual Inspection with Acetic Acid (VIA) screening. This screening method is one that is intended to help with the early detection of cancer.

Working with the Ministry's goal in mind, Dr. Anne Galante (Gynaecologist) performed VIA testing on many of the women in the Upper Pomeroon River. Women from Akawini walked over 3 hours EACH WAY to be seen. This year, at the request of the Guyana Cancer Foundation, Dr. Galante also performed Pap smears on women, prior to the VIA instant visualization method. Results of the Pap smears will be tracked to ensure accurate VIA interpretation, and with the hope of gathering data on risk and prevalence of Human Papilloma virus infection among the indigenous women of the interior.

Follow up of the Pap smear results will be undertaken by the Guyana Cancer Foundation and distributed to the local clinic health care workers. Any women needing care and treatment due to abnormal Pap test results will be assisted by the Guyana Cancer Foundation.

**PATIENT INFORMATION SESSIONS:**

In addition to running clinics, physicians and nurses gave information sessions to the patients on various topics. These included diabetes, back pain, sexual health and the importance of handwashing. Information flyers were also distributed to the patients.

**CONTINUING MEDICAL EDUCATION (CME):****Ptolemy Reid Centre**

The Dev/MH team provided the following continuing medical education sessions to therapists and educational staff at the Ptolemy Reid Centre: Erb's Palsy (Dr. Clare Mitchell and Ms. Paula Holla), Hydrocephalus (Dr. Mitchell) and Supporting Parents of Children with Disabilities (Ms. Winifred Coddett). They also worked with the therapeutic team to provide consultation for children with complex intellectual, neuromuscular and other developmental disorders.

**Paediatric Residency Program:**

The following educational sessions were also provided by the Dev/MH team to the Paediatric Residency Program at GPHC: Monitoring Development (Dr. Mitchell and Ms. Holla); Motor Examination of Infants (Ms. Holla); Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (Dr. Mitchell) and Autism Spectrum Disorders (Dr. Mitchell).

**GUYANA MEDICAL RELIEF (GMR):**

This year, CanGO continued its partnership with Guyana Medical Relief (GMR), a US-based organization that supplies medication and medical supplies to Guyana on a regular basis. GMR has generously supported our mission both financially and with medication that they receive from Direct Relief, another American company.

**Renovation of the Long House**

As was mentioned in the previous report, the Longhouse at Warakaba is centrally located in the Upper Pomeroon River between Karawab, St. Monica and Kabakaburi and is used as CanGO's "home base" while its members are working in Region 2.

Earlier this year, CanGO submitted a proposal to GMR for funds to continue with the renovation of the Longhouse. In addition to their annual financial support to CanGO, GMR approved extra funds to continue with the renovations. These funds were used for the following:

- a. renovate two bathrooms,
- b. build a small kitchen complete with kitchen sink, small stove (that was supplied by "Food for the Poor"), and pantry,
- c. build benches for the waiting room,
- d. repair some of the walls and paint the building, inside and out,
- e. build trellises to hold water tanks.

The Village Council of St. Monica also participated in the renovations. They constructed the following:

- a. A benab complete with kitchen close to the building,
- b. an additional five (5) beds to accommodate our team (they had built ten (10) previously),
- c. a new landing to moor the boats that were transporting patients.

Instead of our group traveling to each village, this year the Village Councils of St. Monica and Kabakaburi provided the boats and CanGO provided the fuel to bring the patients to Warakaba. Patients from Akawini were also seen and treated at Warakaba.

**DAYS FOR GIRLS (DFG):**

DFG is an international organization that manufactures reusable feminine hygiene kits and distributes them to girls in order to empower them to stay in school. Each kit lasts 2-4 years. Again this year a member of DFG, Ms. Johnston, accompanied us and distributed hundreds of kits to children in the Amerindian villages as we provided health care. These kits were very much sought after and appreciated.

**OTHER INITIATIVE:****Training Program in Otolaryngology – Head & Neck Surgery**

On August 1, Dr. Shawn Legall, an Otolaryngology resident in Guyana, arrived in Canada to begin a 10-month Fellowship in the Department of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery at Western University. This program is spearheaded by Dr. Leigh Sowerby and is being administered in partnership with the Global Health Interest Group of the Canadian Society of Otolaryngology – Head & Neck Surgery. Following his Fellowship, Dr. Legall will return to Guyana to begin his career as a General Otolaryngologist at GPHC. He will join the two Otolaryngologists currently serving the population of Guyana.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I'd like to express my sincere appreciation to the following organizations that made this year's mission a resounding success:

All Saints CWL, Strathroy, Canada	Lion Tamesh Jagmohan, Essequibo, Guyana
Audiology Department, London Health Sciences Centre, London, Canada	Ming's Products and Services, Georgetown, Guyana
Barakat Timbers Ltd., Charity, Guyana	Ministries of Public Health, Foreign Affairs and Indigenous Peoples Affairs (Guyana)
Bentley Hearing, London, Canada	Pharmasave, Ingersoll, Canada
B.C.S. Technology International PTY Ltd., Australia	Phoenix Distributors, Kingston, Jamaica
Churchview Hotel, New Amsterdam, Guyana	Project DAWN, Liliendaal, Guyana
Friends of Serviam, Ottawa, Canada	Rotary Club of New Amsterdam, Guyana
Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, Guyana	Shopper's Drug Mart, Ingersoll, Canada
Govie & Narda Nauth, Charity, Guyana	The Home of Rewinding – Jerry Outar, New Amsterdam, Guyana
Guyana Cancer Foundation, Georgetown, Guyana	Toronto Kaitour Lions, Toronto, Canada
Guyana Medical Relief, California, U.S.A.	United Women for Special Children, Georgetown, Guyana
Health Partners International of Canada, Ottawa, Canada	

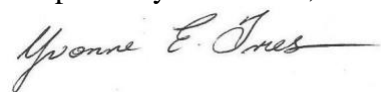
We're also indebted to the **many** individual donors and volunteers - too numerous to mention – for their continued support of this very worthwhile endeavour.

And finally, I'd like to thank the CanGO family for their dedication and service to the people of Guyana. Without them, this mission would not have been possible.

**2018 MISSION**

The next Mission is currently being planned for the Fall of 2018. At that time, we will be returning to the areas where we worked this year to provide continuity of care to patients.

Respectfully Submitted,



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