

THE AUSLMAT 2018 MEDICAL MISSION

Official Trip Report

The AUSLMAT medical mission to Sri Lanka commenced on 8th of July 2018, with a scenic train journey from Colombo Fort to Hatton. The team was headed by Dr. Quintus de Zylva (Cardiologist from Melbourne) and comprised of 7 other doctors: Assoc. Prof Andrew Cochrane (Cardio-thoracic surgeon, Monash Health), Dr. Virginia de Vos (Psychiatrist, Melbourne), Dr. Erosha Premaratne (Endocrinologist, Austin Health), Dr. Sayumi Jayasinghe (Emergency trainee physician), Dr. Louise Marsh (GP from Margaret River, WA), Dr. Carolyn Barshall (GP from the UK) and Dr. Shannon de Silva (dentist from Melbourne). Preethi de Silva (Diabetes educator) and Hashan Fernando (Final year podiatry student) offered expertise in their respective fields.

There were many others in the team who helped to distribute equipment and also provided much needed assistance at the clinics. Dennis Mifsud and Samitha Disanayaka helped with crowd control and triaging at the clinics, while Genny Leeworthy assisted with triaging patients, interpreting and distributing spectacles. We had a number of students in the team whose contribution was invaluable. Nishaji, a local nursing student from Weligama, assisted with interpreting and various other tasks, and Gehan Premaratne, Sayumi Premaratne, Suvinya Disanayaka conducted glucose and blood pressure checks. Florence and Sophie Barshall helped Carolyn with BP checks and organising clinics. Carlos Mifsud and Sarah Smith assisted Louise similarly in the clinics. Dr. Shannon de Silva conducted dental clinics and Rochelle de Silva (primary school teacher) had the opportunity to spend time at one of the local kindergartens and distribute teaching material. Also our gratitude to the local people involved, particularly the drivers, interpreters and local organisers – particularly the Red Cross helpers at the busy Weligama clinic. We were so graciously welcomed and supported by the local medical and nursing staff and administrators at the various hospitals and clinics we visited.

Soon after arriving in Hatton, the group visited **St. Gabrielle's Boarding House** in Hatton, the home to about 20 schoolgirls aged between 7 and 19. We were warmly welcomed by Sister Mary Immaculate, her church members and the happy and smiling faces of the young girls. The girls entertained us with songs and dances and were eager to share their stories and participate in games with the young ones in our group. Toys, stationary, clothes and treats were received with warm gratitude. The staff highlighted the need for urgent funds for building maintenance and ongoing requirements for study material for the students, some of whom have been orphaned or estranged from their parents.

The team conducted a general medical clinic at the **Holy Rosary Church Hall** in Hatton on the 9th. The clinic was attended by approximately 150 people, presenting with various medical complaints; mostly chest infections, gastritis, asthma, skin problems, joint and foot problems and diabetes. Reading glasses, donated clothes and footwear were distributed. All attendees were also screened for diabetes and high blood pressure.

Following a picturesque drive around the Castlereigh reservoir, the team attended a clinic for over 70 **Dunkeld Tea Estate** workers on the afternoon of the 10th. We were treated to a guided tour around the tea-processing factory before commencing the clinic. The health concerns of the estate workers evolved from long years of hard labour and poor living conditions. Most estate workers suffer from chronic back pain from heavy lifting, other musculoskeletal problems and malnutrition.

The team headed to the **Bandarawela District Hospital** early on the 11th morning and was presented with the hospital statistics by the DMO, Dr. Leelananda Gallage. The hospital is under-funded and under-resourced in terms of medical and nursing staff to patient ratios, and is in dire need of being upgraded to a Base hospital in order to attract more government fund allocations. The emergency department alone attends to 600-700 patients a day, between 5 doctors! Pleasingly a new building is under construction and is expecting to contain the male and female medical wards, a paediatric ward and the emergency department. The lack of a cardiac service in Bandarawela was brought to our attention, and the potential for AUSLMAT to support the establishment of such a service was pledged by Dr. Quintus de Zylva. Professor Andrew Cochrane delivered a lecture on "Mitral valve disease" to the medical staff at the **Diyathalawa Hospital**.

The journey continued down south on the 12th to the **Denipitiya Kanishka Vidyalaya Grounds** in Weligama, where we were welcomed with bouquets of flowers by young students and the gorgeous school band. Assisted by Mr. Savinda Samarakoon (a local optometrist who conducted eye checks and distributed spectacles) and Dr. Piumika Jayawardena, the team tirelessly reviewed over 400 people who presented with various medical complaints. Most attendees underwent blood pressure and random capillary glucose checks, revealing many cases of previously undiagnosed hypertension and diabetes. Lack of proper foot-ware use due to unaffordability and poor knowledge of foot care in the general population were identified as major problems leading to feet related complications in patients with diabetes and vascular disease.

We visited the **Karapitiya Hospital** on the 13th. Here, Dr. Quintus de Zylva and Prof. Andrew Cochrane handed over AUD 10,000 dollars of cardiac equipment to Dr. Sathananthan at the Cardiology Unit. The equipment (cardiac catheters, balloons and stents) has been donated by Austin Health (organised by Prof. Omar Farouque) and by Dr. Jennifer Johns. The unit has also previously benefited from the donations of equipment and interventional cardiology training from the AUSLMAT team on many occasions. Dr. Erosha Premaratne delivered a presentation entitled “An approach to the care and follow up of diabetic patients” to the medical staff and students. Ms. Preethi de Silva presented a lecture to the local nurses and diabetes educators on the “Patient education on diet and diabetes management” and Mr. Hashan Fernando presented on “Foot care”. A large quantity of insulin pens, needles and glucose monitoring equipment was handed to Dr. Muditha Weerakkody in the Diabetes Dept. by Ms. Preethi de Silva and Dr. Erosha Premaratne. Resuscitation equipment was also donated to the Emergency Dept. by Dr. Louise Marsh.

The mission was concluded with an afternoon spent watching the Sri-Lanka- South Africa test cricket game held at the Galle stadium, and an evening walk along the Galle Fortress. To all of those who participated in the mission, it was a very busy, yet extremely rewarding experience. For those of us who had spent our childhoods in Sri Lanka, it was an opportunity to give back to our motherland even in a very small way, and for the young students in our team, it was a chance to realise their potential to make a difference in others’ lives. Many of the students promised to go back and assist in future medical missions.

Please visit our [photo gallery](#) on www.auslmat.org to see a snippet of our work, which many of you have so graciously contributed to in both time and money (for goods and transportation). If you feel compelled to contribute, or know anyone who does want to further our cause, please click on the DONATE NOW button on almost every page of our website. We will gladly accept any level of assistance.

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The trip commenced with Dr Quintus de Zylva and Dr Jennifer Johns being interviewed by Colombo TV station Derana. The interview explored the work done by AUSLMAT since the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami and went to air a few days later.

The group congregated in Negombo and headed towards Batticaloa on the east coast, stopping in Dambulla overnight to enjoy the sights of Sigyria and Minneriya. At Batticaloa Teaching Hospital, endocrinologist Dr Dharshini Karrupiah, chaired a very successful half day conference, entitled “Caring for your patient with older age and diabetes.” Several AUSLMAT team members gave lectures, including geriatricians Dr Sanka Amadoru and Dr Rajni Joseph, intensive care specialist Dr Irma Belgrami and diabetes educator Ms Preethi De Silva. The meeting was very well-attended and there was excellent engagement by the local doctors and nurses. We delivered insulin syringes and diabetes monitoring equipment, kindly donated by medical supply company BD and by Preethi De Silva. Dr Jennifer spent a day with cardiologist Dr Kanagasingam Arulnithy, advising on some complex cardiac patients and delivering a transport ventilator, donated by Mr Max Nayagar, head of biomedical engineering at the Alfred Hospital.

The team visited Valaichennai District Hospital, which we have visited on several previous occasions. The staff do an excellent job of caring for the local community, especially in the areas of rehabilitation following stroke and psychiatry. However, the hospital is very under-resourced and struggles to cope with demand. We did a general medical clinic in Valaichennai, focussing on hypertension and diabetes. We were also performed eye-testing on several patients and were able to provide them with reading glasses donated by many of our supporters.

The next stop was Matara Hospital, where we renewed friendships with several colleagues, including cardiologist, Dr Roshan Gunaratne. Dr Jennifer consulted on several complex cardiac patients and gave a lecture on “Recent Advances in the Management of Heart Failure.” We have previously donated equipment such as defibrillators and ECG machines to the cardiac unit at Matara.

The team also visited Akuressa Hospital where we have previously donated medical equipment – wheelchairs, surgical equipment and wound dressings.

Associate Professor Omar Farouque from the Austin Hospital in Melbourne, spent the week in the catheter laboratory at Karapitiya Teaching Hospital. He supervised and supported the interventional team, headed by Dr Sathananthan. The team at KTH have become very skilled at coronary intervention over the past few years. Approximately 20 complex patients underwent procedures with stent insertions and many more patients will be treated over the coming months. Our heartfelt thanks to Jody Douglas from device company Terumo and Tamara Rapoport from Medtronic. They provided dozens of state of the art catheters, stents, guidewires and other interventional equipment for use in patients who could not afford their treatment in Sri Lanka.

Finally, a large general clinic was held in Weligama at the Hemachandra Maha Vidyalaya. More than 100 patients were seen by AUSLMAT doctors, assisted by Drs Piumika Jayawardena, Upali Mendis and Dharmapriya Wijesinghe from Sri Lanka.

It was a very busy and rewarding trip. There have been positive changes in Sri Lanka over the past 13 years, but there is still much more to do!

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