



Report Interplast mission Mangu Nigeria 1-16 October 2016

Team:

Cees Spronk	Plastic surgeon, leader of the team, “Dad”
Neeltje Spronk	Deputy Faridpur, “Mom”
Chantal Moues	Plastic surgeon
Sandra Dijkstra	Operation assistant
Annet Brouwer	Operation assistant
Irma Brouwer	Student (Training teacher)
Rob Eissens	Anaesthesiologist assistant
Lisanne van der Warf	Recovery nurse
Jurjen Oosterhuis	Anaesthesiologist
Anouk Tan	Plastic surgeon (trainee), author report

On 1 October 2016 the Interplast Holland adventure starts at Schiphol. All suitcases with medical equipment and presents for the children are checked in. After a drink we go to the gate and board for the plane to Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, where we arrive early in the morning. Kefas, the medical manager of the Cocin Hospital and his team welcome us. The suitcases are fastened with ropes and nets upon the roof of the car after which our trip to Mangu begins. The cars have signs with “Cocin hospital, burn prevention care programme”, which helps us to pass military checkpoints easily, where people wave at us while passing. The last part of the trip is via a road with many potholes followed by bumpy dirt roads. After a relatively short night in the plane we all arrive somewhat tired in Mangu. The guesthouse is beautiful and much more luxurious than expected. The rooms are situated around a fenced court and are all equipped with a private bathroom and a mosquito net around the bed. The guesthouse is surrounded by a wall and a fence. After lunch everybody tries to sleep somewhat to make up for the short night. In the afternoon we are shown around the hospital premises where we meet the local hospital staff.

The hospital is 50 metres away from the guesthouse and consists of several buildings around which the families of patients are housed. Goats and chickens are walking about. In the evening we all go to bed early.

On Monday 3 October we start screening the patients after breakfast. In front of the Out Patient Department (OPD) there is a crowd of people. A man behind a small wooden table writes down the names of the patients using a megaphone to call them.



Two patients are shown into the screening room where they are seen by the doctors who are confronted with a large range of pathology: large tumours, hypospadias, schisms and a large variety of burns contractures. We are deeply impressed...



While over 100 patients are seen at the OPD and the operation lists are made for the next two weeks, the rest thoroughly cleans the operation theatres and supply them with the medical equipment that was brought along.

The crowd does not seem to become smaller but around five o'clock we see the last patient. The operation theatres are clean and are fully equipped with two tables where can be operated simultaneously. The next day we can start working properly!

Tired of all the impressions we go to the inner court of the guesthouse, where we discuss today's special illnesses while eating and drinking something. After sunset the generator is switched on for electricity. In the living room we enjoy a meal prepared by Phoebe.

The next day we start operating. Everyone works enthusiastically and hard, listening to music coming from a small portable Bluetooth speaker. At noon we visit the guesthouse where Phoebe and Neeltje serve a delicious lunch. At half past five we are done operating and go to the ward where the patients stay. At the OPD we see a small crowd again, waiting for the team of Western doctors, news which spreads rapidly.

We change the operation programme somewhat, thus finding time for these people in the next two weeks.

After this we hurry to the guesthouse for a drink and supper. In the evening we play cards or read a book. Tired because of the heat and our first busy day we go to sleep early and are sung asleep by the many crickets.



The days after are the same: half past seven breakfast, 8 o'clock we start operating, lunch in the guesthouse, then operating again and visiting the ward and OPD, having a drink and supper prepared by Phoebe, playing cards, Yahtzee, reading and sleeping...

Despite this rigid scheme all days are different and full of new adventures.

Because of the large number of patients we also decide to operate on Saturday in the morning. In the afternoon there is time for relaxation and time to explore the surroundings. After a walk through the corn fields we see the river where many children are swimming, yelling enthusiastically "Baturi, Baturi!", which means white people after which they run towards us. The picturesque surroundings together with their dark skins and bright clothes are good for nice pictures.



At the end of the afternoon Cees takes us to another part of the river. The locals are extremely friendly and greet us cordially. They all know a team of Western doctors have arrived for which they are very grateful.

On Sunday we all go to church: a real happening with locals in their best clothes: beautiful colourful dresses with matching kerchiefs and ribbons. There is a gospel choir and Cees is asked to introduce the entire team. Again we are thanked for our help. Later in the afternoon Neeltje shows us the old guesthouse and we watch a soccer match of the locals somewhere on a hill.

There are also many operations in the second week and many patients return to have their wounds checked and to have their bandages changed. Fortunately all the operations have been successful. Some of us, however, suffer from health problems and cannot come to the hospital for some days. The rest of us takes on a greater challenge so that our programme can be done as planned. We don't have to cancel any patients!

Friday morning is our last day for operations. We say goodbye to the local operation team and make an inventory for the mission in March 2017. Everyone has worked very hard resulting in 98 operations!



In the afternoon we clean up and pack our belongings. At the end of the day we visit the local market in Mangu: an enormous happening, with crowds of people carrying buckets with groceries on their heads. Vegetables and fruits are neatly presented in market stalls in the middle of this chaos. The market is a sight for us and so are we for the locals. We all take many pictures.

In the evening we have supper together with the medical staff in the guesthouse. The local population gives all team members a beautiful canvas to show their gratitude. For Cees and Neeltje there is also a tile with a picture to express the local gratitude for their efforts over the years. It will be hung on the wall of the guesthouse so that they will be remembered for years to come.

After breakfast on Saturday we leave for Abuja to return early next morning via London in Amsterdam where we arrive safely Sunday night.

These two weeks have been one great adventure in which I have seen and learnt much. We worked very hard, but we also had a great time! I'd like to thank all team members for their efforts and their presence! It was an unforgettable experience. I can recommend all trainee-assistants of plastic surgery to join a mission of Interplast. You see many syndromes which you only come across in study-books in the Netherlands and which can easily be treated with a simple procedure meaning very much for the patients there.

Just like everyone else I also left for Nigeria with some fear as we all know the stories about Boko Haram. I did not feel unsafe for a single moment and found all the people over there very friendly and grateful. They are given an appointment for an operation and wait the entire day near the hospital with a smile on their face, which is a great contrast to some Dutch patients who sometimes become angry when they have to wait for half an hour...



The Team



Anouk