

PIHC BURMA PROJECT

Perth Integrated Health Occupational Therapist Monique Blackwell travelled to Burma in January/February of 2007 to represent PIHC with a small group of health professionals and volunteers. The mission – to offer hands on support in free health clinics and investigate the need for resources and health education.

Burma, often referred to as the “Third World of the Third World,” is run by a strict militia rule. Poverty, drug abuse, prostitution, poor education, health care and particularly AIDS are paramount issues.

For 3 weeks Monique and the group worked with the Sister’s of the Apparition, a group of nuns who dedicate their lives to attend to the sick, care for the orphaned children and the elderly. These nuns have already established 27 missionary houses in Burma which are primarily centred around health clinics and orphanages, in which they run and fund themselves. Monique spent most of her time working with the missionary nuns using her neuromuscular skills in the health clinics and found a huge demand for this treatment amongst the villagers.

In a country where education is only for the wealthy, the Burmese people have no basic understanding of their health and the importance of hygiene and a balanced diet. The main conditions presented at the health clinic were:

1. Cardiac conditions: young people suffering from strokes due to high levels of salt intake and lack of nutritional balance in their diet.
2. Muscle and joint related conditions: including migraines (from upper back and neck problems), deformities (a result of the physical nature of work and poor maintenance of muscles) and arthritis. The majority of villagers who presented at the health clinics worked as farmers or labourers where both their own livelihood as well as their family’s was dependent upon their physical health and wellbeing.

Due to the militia rule, there is great oppression of the people and neglect of their human rights. Hence, the people of Burma often rely on the generosity of other countries including Australia to live. Whilst the Burmese people have been living with this oppression for many years and achieving the ideal is not realistic, Monique and the visiting group of health professionals found a great need and opportunity to empower the Burmese people through health education. During her visit, Monique was able to pass on neuromuscular therapy techniques to the nuns and villages to treat symptoms such as ‘heavy legs,’ sciatica, headaches, lower back pain and joint pain/restrictions in range of motion.

Monique is planning to return to Burma in February 2008 with a team of health professionals to offer their hands on skills and knowledge in health care with the main aim of educating the nuns in general health care. Monique is now involved in organising subsequent visits to achieve PIHC’s mission of improving health care within the villages,

encouraging other health professionals to offer their time towards the mission and coordinating fundraising for required resources within the missionary health clinics. For more information on this mission and how to become involved, please contact Monique at monique@pihc.com.au.