

“Memories of the People”

(April-May 2015 to Mae Sot, Umphang, Nuepo, Umpiem Mai, Paw Bula Hta Clinic.)

This was my first trip for Borderless Dentists and turned out to be a very eye-opening experience, and one that I hope to repeat.

Although we did not work at Mae Tao clinic, we did have a tour of the different buildings in the clinic. This was my first exposure to the broad range of problems affecting the Burmese people in Thailand. The dental clinic here is a small but important part of a much larger operation catering in what limited way it can to the health needs of the Burmese people in this area.



Most of our time was spent working in Umpiem Mai and Nuepo refugee camps. Dr. Taka organised a good itinerary to spread our workload between these two places, so that we could help as many people as possible over our time there. Both camps had an endless supply of patients. The amount of basic emergency dental care that is needed there is immense and no matter how many people you see, there are always more waiting. Most of the work we did was providing basic emergency care in the form of extractions. Dr. Taka did organise some facilities to do basic GIC fillings with, however the amount of patients in pain or with very broken down teeth means that extractions took priority. It's not that there is no need for basic restorative work, just that there is still a need for an even more basic level of care to get people out of pain.



We worked with dental medics, Toto and Sai Win Chan, who helped with breaking the language barrier as well as eagerly watching as we worked to try and learn as much as they could. The dental medics play an important part in providing emergency extractions for pain relief while Dr. Taka and the Borderless Dentists are not present. Dr. Taka has worked very hard to train a good few dental medics, and where possible, they do good work in his absence.

As well as working in the refugee camps, we travelled to Paw Bula Hta Clinic, situated in a small village on the border. The clinic here makes the clinics in the refugee camps look luxurious. Supplies were almost non-existent and the facilities beyond basic. Dr. Taka supplied most of the equipment used and we joined him in training a new batch of dental medics. The trainees travelled in from other villages in Burma to start learning the information needed to become a dental medic. We helped Dr. Taka teach local anaesthesia and suture techniques. This gave a good appreciation for the amount of time and work required to train dental medics.



Of the whole trip, the thing that will stick with me most is the people. The dental work is also very rewarding itself and provides a feeling of accomplishment you can't get from treating patients in a first world clinic, but when the dust has settled the people make the memories. What will stick with me is the memories of the NGO workers and their interesting stories, the site of the kids in the orphanage we saw, the wrinkles on the faces of their overworked carers, the attitudes of the people in the refugee camps (a unique blend of hope and hopelessness), the gratitude of the patients we treated shown in the most modest ways, the passion Dr. Taka shows when approaching everything he does. Those memories will be with me forever. That makes the whole trip worthwhile and makes you feel like you achieved something. Overall a very rewarding trip with Borderless Dentists, but not for the reasons I expected.

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