

PARTNER PLAN

An ecumenical appointment with:



Gillian Rose - Bangladesh March 2015

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Dear Friends in Scotland

Sunday 1st February 2015, and high time to begin my first letter of the new year to bring you up to date with the life and work of Bollobhpur Hospital.



January has come to an abrupt end, and we are already stepping into February with Christmas a fading memory and Lent already on the horizon. Three months have flown by since I sent my later letter and Christmas greetings in early November anxious that you should receive them this year, and not get lost in the Christmas post as in the previous year!!

And it was a good thing that I was early with posting as 'general strikes' are now a major part of the country's daily programme, disrupting not only the postal services but also every part of the ordinary peace loving citizen's daily living. And to add insult to injury I foolishly broke my wrist at the beginning of December and have been working 'left-handed' with my right arm in plaster for six weeks. I certainly now appreciate the value of a right hand!



But the good news is that the plaster was removed two weeks ago and the fractured bone has united well and though the hand doesn't look like my hand yet, it is getting back into action and praise the Lord I can write again. The main hardship was not been able to write, but thankfully I was able to manage the marking of the December examination papers with my left hand. Thank God with me for my healing.

But politically the country is in a horrible mess again after almost a year of relative peace under Sheikh Hasina's one party government.

But now the opposition party which boycotted the last general election have commenced a now stop agitation programme to oust the government and force another general election. And the agitation programme is not a nice one. It not only consists of forced strikes and stand stills, playing havoc with the transport system and disrupting the supplies of essential foodstuffs to the markets and shops, ruining the farming and business communities, shutting down schools and colleges, and upsetting the education system schedule etc. etc. But it also means people throwing petrol

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bombs at buses and trucks and any other vehicle that attempts to ply the forbidden streets, causing fearful burn injuries to any passengers inside. Parked vehicles, even trains are being torched and burned beyond recognition and, horror of horrors, even sleepers are being removed from rail lines, causing derailment of trains and nasty accidents. Many have died from their burn injuries and the burn units of the city hospital are full of patients and grieving relatives waiting anxiously.

The working community has been the worse hit with those who rely on daily labour for a living sitting idle while everything has ground to a standstill around them and no work available. May God forgive us all and bring everyone to their senses.

November saw a change in the village clinics with the new case nurses piling excitedly into the hospital car to go for their first village duty, relieving their seniors who come into the hospital to prepare for their final examinations in December.

December 13th saw a small group of girls sitting the entrance examination for Nursing Training in 2015 – numbers are fewer now than in previous years as more girls are completing their Higher school Certificate (A levels) and aiming for the Senior Graduate Nursing Course which means entry to the government medical service, a lifetime of a secure job and pension at the end. It is good that the girls are aiming higher. Our senior trained Bollobhpur girls are however highly valued and also get secure jobs for their working life. Indeed many of our girls in training here now have passed their Higher School Certificate but were unable to get placement at a government nursing college, sheer numbers make it impossible for all to get a chance.



And not only at Bollobhpur but in five other centres girls are sitting the examination today, for as I have mentioned before, our girls come from all over Bangladesh. And new to us this last year are girls from the tribal group of the Chittagong Hill Tracts where the Church of Bangladesh is working amongst the animist and Buddhist communities and new churches are being set up and many converts made.

16th December 2014 brought once again as in previous years our Bangladesh Victory Day celebrations in the ward with our patients. There are classes for singing, dancing, poetry reading and drama, all based on the beautiful songs and lyrics and poems which were written at the time. The standard is high and everyone listens and watches spellbound as it is difficult for the judges to decide who should get the prizes. But in the end there are prizes for all and the beautiful poem depicting the mother at home in her village preparing different seasonal food as the months pass by for the son who never returns home, wins first prize yet again this year by another competitor. Today's politicians who are creating havoc in the country at the moment seem to have forgotten the many who laid down their lives that they might live in an independent and peaceful land.

December 19th & 20th brought not only preparations for Christmas, decorating of the wards and departments, but also the final examinations for the seniors and Dr Alok who comes from the government hospital in Meherpur to conduct the viva was pleased with them all. They now await the results of their written papers.

Christmas Eve brought the beautiful first celebration of Christmas, always a special time for me as I am on ward duty on Christmas morning, giving all the trained staff a special day off to spend with their families. After the service the night workers took over the ward with everyone else gathering

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in the kitchen to knead, roll and cut and fry a huge mound of *luchi's* (fried breads) for their Christmas breakfast and a huge tureen of savoury lentils to eat with them.

Christmas Day was a quiet day on the wards, with the birth of the Christmas baby. Though all the incubators are full of tiny 'Christmas' babies, needing care day and night and all the little woolly cardigans and caps are in use as the weather turns colder. We and they are grateful to our generous knitting friends in Scotland. Thank you so much.

Pause to give my two dogs a much needed 'Sunday' bath, the first since I broke my arm two months ago so they were not expecting it and were captured quite easily!!



Also several pauses to admit patients as the hospital is busy and we are without a resident doctor again, the committee having decided not to keep Dr Soren after his probationary period and the present doctor lives outside and comes in on only four days a week.

Our last monthly Community Health meeting of the year was well attended as the Christmas meeting brings a lucky dip with presents for all and each centre brings a drama based on a subject given them to prepare. Easily the best was once again the group from Ratanpur clinic with their well-prepared hilarious and thought provoking sketch on diabetes. The "quack" doctor hails a rickshaw to take him to the market in the next village, where he immediately sets up his stall and shouts his wares; and diabetes will be "finish, finish, finish" with his medicine and treatment. It turns out that the rickshaw puller is a diabetic himself and pricks up his ears and decides to try the 'once cure' offer.

He is given a glass of laced date palm juice, which he drinks and then another. Date palm juice is very sweet and he asks for another glass before paying the fee and cycling off with another customer. That night the reaction sets in and he is carried unconscious to Bollobhpur hospital to be revived and have his diabetes stabilised. And ending, of course, when he returns home well, for the search for the quack doctor and chasing him across the stage with a stick!! Very funny and everyone was in fits of laughter but this is actually the sort of thing that is going on in Bangladesh.

Indeed in three of my village clinics last week I had patients who had stopped their treatment, having paid for some powder from someone visiting their village, the powder being a one-off treatment for diabetes! Obviously that person does not return to that village again and the mobile number he gives everyone is false and never answered!

After the dramas and the 'exciting' lucky dip, we finished the meeting in prayer together, thanking God for his blessing on this last year of service in the community and asking help and strength to provide an even better service in the new year. This last meeting is always a very special time of us and a lovely finish to the year.

December 26th sees the opening of the week long Christmas fair which is traditional to Bollobhpur village and stalls and teashops having sprung up all around the football field and the village children excitedly awaiting the beginning of the sports. And each evening a service of praise and thanksgiving, when the make singing troupes of the village bring their music, song and dancing to lift everyone's heart up to God.

December 30th brought the senior group to the office to sign for their hard earned certificates and say tearful farewells. Soon we will be hearing of the new jobs they have found. None remain idle,

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all find good employment in hospitals, clinics, community programmes and in industrial nursing. We are proud of them all. Please keep them in your prayers as they set out in their new lives of employment.

January 1st 2015 brought a packed parish communion service, the traditional start to the new year in the Church of Bangladesh before we all fan out to our duties for the day, I to Ratanpur village clinic and the senior staff to the wards and office. The girls (our student nurses) have rice with an egg curry for a special New Year breakfast and a chicken curry with their midday rice meal. As I have mentioned before, meat is a highly priced item and we can only afford to serve it on high days and holidays!

The year started well, with a flurry of new babies in the maternity ward and double occupants in our five incubators. The geriatric ward "G ward" is full too with eighteen elderly folk being cared for by our 1st year students and Sister Nilsury keeping a careful eye on them all. I have managed a new incubator with my pension and it has been occupied since its arrival. Our incubators rarely remain empty and babies are sent from all over the region for care. Indeed very sick babies referred to big medical college hospitals at Rajshahi often rather turn up for admission at Bollobhpur!! And praise God with us that through not all very premature babies survive, there are few deaths and the majority go home, fully breast feeding in their grateful parents arms.



Monday January 19th and the first of the new Preliminary Training School new girls arrive. Indeed this year, due to the political strife and constant strikes, it took almost three weeks for the sixteen girls to arrive to start their training. Indeed the country is in a horrible mess and we are finding difficult to get supplies and especially getting our oxygen cylinders replaced at Khulna,. Every hospital and clinic in the country is facing the same problem.

And in the education sector, children cannot get to school and the school certificate examinations scheduled for this month are having to be rescheduled repeatedly much is the concern of parents and students alike. Parents are afraid to let their children out of their sight and are not only accompanying them to the examination centres but are patiently standing waiting outside for three hours and more until the examination is finished and they can take their child home.

I have been unable to do the monthly trip to Khulna to supervise the clinic there and bring oxygen and supplies. Indeed our "new" hospital car rarely leaves the hospital grounds and only does the weekly trip to the three nearby village clinics. We cannot risk its being damaged or burnt.

Sunday February 15th and I bring my letter to a close as a huge male monkey arrives with his wife and six babies to investigate what there is to eat in the garden!! They have been infrequent visitors this year so far. But one who has been rejected by his pack "lives" in the vicinity and visits the hospital shop to accept bread and biscuits at Bisu, the shopkeepers hand!

The weather is warming up and spring is here, and the air is full of bird song as I close with greetings and thanks from us all.