

PARTNER PLAN

An ecumenical appointment with:



Gillian Rose - Bangladesh April 2011

Bollobhpur Hospital
PO Kedargonj
District Meherpur
Bangladesh

Gillian Rose is an
Ecumenical Partner of the
Church of Bangladesh Group

Dear Friends in Scotland

Sunday March 13th 2011 and the 1st Sunday in Lent, and I am well overdue in putting pen to you all. I see my last letter was signed off on November 28th, Advent Sunday, a huge gap in communication, though I did manage to get some sort of an annual report written and into the post to help you to keep up with our news.

December has flown by with all its activities. Examinations for most groups, decorations for the wards and the church, the annual Independence Day celebrations, changes in all the clinics, and then the classroom closed and the joy of the Christmas season's celebrations together.



Likewise January and February flew by without trace, and the newest group of girls are into their third month of the Preliminary training school and it is time for me to post examination dates on the notice board for them!

We have continued without a resident medical officer, though the hospital has been busy with over 90% bed occupancy during the time. But thanks be to God, patients have received good nursing care and treatment and have returned home well, grateful to Bollobhpur hospital for their renewed health, and mothers have returned home to their families with a healthy baby at the breast. The incubators have been working full time with small occupants coming from different hospitals and clinics in the district, some from a good distance away. We are grateful to visiting doctors who have given us some time in their own very busy schedules to help us in our work.

The daily papers have not made happy reading – the fearful cold winter you had to endure. Weather catastrophes in other lands, like the flooding in Australia, earthquakes in New Zealand and Japan and other places, water shortage and famine in some African countries.

And now the news of the uprising in the Arab States, the overflow of long stay dictators, the world seems to have lost any idea of peace and sanity. Here in Bangladesh, thanks to God, we are, in contrast, a peaceful place with its own elected government running the country smoothly, though the extreme rise in price of basic commodities (and for the Bengali people this means "rice" especially) is causing loss of confidence in the government at present. The worldwide price rises mean nothing to the common man; he expects the government to do something about it and solve his problems with daily living and brining up and feeding his family, and to do it immediately!!

121 George Street • Edinburgh EH2 4YN

t 0131 225 5722 f 0131 226 6121 e world@cofscotland.org.uk w www.churchofscotland.org.uk/worldmission
Charity Number: SC011353

PARTNER PLAN

And although the government is making heroic attempts to keep the price of rice stable, unscrupulous traders and hoarders do not help them, and often the lower priced grain earmarked for the poor, is siphoned off before it reaches them, and people who have queued up for hours with their bags, return home empty handed.

Shortage of water has again become a huge problem this year, and especially so as it started in the winter months, rather than the hot weather as last year. Tube wells and ring wells are no longer providing people with the water they need and city corporations are not able to provide around the clock water supply, taps only function for a short time twice a day. This is again a cause for unrest, and university students have been agitating and breaking things up, and demanding immediate solving of their water problems by the authorities, which obviously is not possible, water levels have sunk so low.

Praise God, our two ring wells, sunk last year, are still providing fresh drinking water for patients and for our girls. But sheer numbers often causes the wells to 'run dry', and we have to wait for them to fill up again.

It is against this background that we have continued our work and witness at Bollobhpur Hospital in this quiet corner of rural Bangladesh.

But to recap on events:

December 1st 2010, saw my cow Junu with yet another new golden brown calf, her eleventh (or it is twelfth? I have lost count!) She has since provided milk for Monju and her little Mark who is now an energetic and delightful two year old. Monju and Mark are now back in Dhaka and reunited with Mark's father in a more convenient flat than their previous one, Monju now has attached bathroom and water supply which enables her to live an independent life. Please keep this little family in your prayers, as they deal with relationship problems, and try to start anew together.



December 8th, 9th & 10th found me in the classroom invigilating Midwifery examinations. And it is good to be able to report that all passed well and are now proudly wearing their red-striped 3rd Year caps.

Saturday & Sunday December 11th & 12th brought "all change" in the outstation clinics and I went to Khulna with an excited group of girls who will staff the clinic there, and spend Christmas with Kalpona. Kalpona is doing well in her little laboratory especially as she now has a senior laboratory student to assist her and gain experience himself.

Kalpona has decided this year not to go home for Christmas. Home is in a village a good distance away, and means being hauled on and off buses, and staying in inconvenient surroundings with the only lavatory a distance from the house and no running water. The thought of her village home makes her realise just how much she relies on the two 1st year girls who spend a month with her on rotation and help her with her daily living.

But the good news is that Kalpona's elderly mother and father came to spend Christmas with her at the clinic, which was a lovely reunion for them, and they enjoyed their time together. Her parents are especially heartbroken in that now three of their four children are now suffering from the same muscle wasting disease.

121 George Street • Edinburgh EH2 4YN

t 0131 225 5722 f 0131 226 6121 e world@cofscotland.org.uk w www.churchofscotland.org.uk/worldmission
Charity Number: SC011353

PARTNER PLAN

Thursday December 16th 2010 and Victory Day for Bangladesh and the girls especially excelled themselves in the variety show of song and dance and drama that they performed for their patients in the evening. And as usual, it was difficult for those who were judging to decide who should get the prizes!!

December 16th & 17th found the senior group sitting their Final Midwifery examinations with our friend Dr Alok from the government hospital in Meherpur coming to conduct the viva, and again it is good to be able to report that he was pleased with them all, and that the written results have since come through, and all have passed well.



Saturday December 18th brought the monthly Community Health meeting, well attended by the staff from all the community clinics and the senior girls. Monthly reports were read and discussed, and then on a lighter note, the second year girls entertained us with a hilarious drama depicting the danger and consequences of child marriage, this still being a too common occurrence in Bangladesh, despite being banned by the government. The staff of Ratanpur clinic then brought a well planned drama teaching the need for 'safe motherhood'. Then tea and Christmas cake, and presents for all, and all delve excitedly into the lucky dip. And then a time of prayer and thanksgiving for another year of service, before all leave for their respective clinics, and Sunil gets the hospital car out to help them catch their buses, as days are short now, and it is dark by 5.30pm.

In the run up to Christmas, we invite the "Earthen Vessels" prayer group to come into the hospital for an Advent prayer and praise meeting, and we all gather together under the lychee tree, the darkness dispelled by candles and our Muslim patients and relatives watch and listen to the gospel being preached, and the sheer joy of the Christmas season is echoed in the singing and the praying. A most precious time together and we thank God again for all his blessings to us.

Friday December 24th finds us all in church for the first Holy Communion service of Christmas, just a handful of girls left to look after the patients on the wards. Everyone brings a candle and the church is gay with candle light and the colourful decorations our girls have helped put up.

We return in the pitch dark, our way lit by the huge star that Babu has hung at the very top of a long bamboo at the entrance to the hospital gate. Inside, candles light up the stable the girls have set up under the mango tree in the centre of the grounds.

We return, the night nurses to take over the wards for the night and the rest join together, a happy noisy group, to knead, roll out and fry hundreds of 'luchees' (fried breads) for their Christmas breakfast, while another group pluck several chickens in preparation for the midday Christmas curry, a huge treat in a land where in general, people (especially our girls) rarely get meat on their menus.

I take the ward report for the night and take over the responsibility for the hospital, all the trained staff having a special extra day off to spend with their families. Midnight and cooking complete, the girls erupt out to sing carols and dance around the stable until they are firmly sent to bed!

Christmas Day December 25th 2010 and the girls work short shifts on the wards and are free to visit houses and relatives in the neighbourhood during their off duty time. The day starts with a sung parish communion, the church packed to the doors and the congregation spilling out on to the verandah's and the path.

121 George Street • Edinburgh EH2 4YN

t 0131 225 5722 f 0131 226 6121 e world@cofscotland.org.uk w www.churchofscotland.org.uk/worldmission
Charity Number: SC011353

PARTNER PLAN

On the wards our "Christmas baby" arrives at 8am – a tiny very sick two day old baby, brought from a big government hospital at Chuadanga (the district town of the next district to Meherpur) where there is no shortage of qualified doctors and paediatricians and senior trained nurses and midwives. It is very humbling to see the parents and relatives coming with these small babies, confident that if they can only get the baby as far as Bollobhpur Hospital, then their baby will get better and the tiny premature ones will survive.

The baby is indeed very sick, but we pray and treat him. He is too ill to be fed, he needs to have intravenous fluids through a cannula in one of his minute limbs. We are grateful to Dr Helen from England who taught us so much in her short stay about the care and treatment of small babies.

Other patients are admitted during the day, and a healthy lively Christmas baby is born, which makes everyone happy.

Sunday December 26th and the annual Christmas 'mela' (fair) is opened on the big playing field adjacent to the church. Sporting events begin which will last for the whole week, and stalls have sprung up all around the area selling all sorts of cheap knick-knacks.(a great attraction for our girls) and I was amazed this year to see a stall full of blankets, mostly very expensive, and another stall holder with some furniture. I never found out if they managed to sell any of their wares!

Alongside the days enjoyments, a prayer and praise meeting is held each evening in the church. These I notice are not so well attended as in previous years, and some new ideas are needed. And each night, the lads of the village stage a drama in the grounds of the school to add to the general enjoyment of the season.

Monday 27th December and an early start for a group of eight very excited senior girls, who are into the last six months of their training, and today are going to the Baptist Mission Hospital at Joyramkura, near Haluaghat in the north of the country, where they will receive three months operation theatre and surgical nursing training. Again, we are grateful to Dr Tapash and his wife Dr Lucy Rema for accepting them!

Our Babu goes with them, and we are relieved to receive a call from his mobile that they have arrived safely, and he returns at 11pm, with the returning group, tired but happy to be back.

Tuesday 28th December and it is 'all change' for the senior girls in the clinics who are returning to the hospital for their last examination in Medicine and Community Health in preparation to leaving us at the end of the month. We are delighted that seven of this group will be going together to staff a new Christian hospital at the other side of the country, near to the border with 'Burma' (Myanmar).

Thursday December 30th 2010 and the leavers gather in the office to sign for their hard earned certificates and make their tearful farewells. This group includes Olivia, Santa, Sabitri, Tandra and Akhi and widowed Silpi who have been sponsored by generous friends in Scotland. We are indeed grateful to you all. You will be pleased to hear that the Management Committee has decided to keep Silpi on as a Staff Nurse, so her future is more secure.

Saturday 1st January 2011 and by tradition of the Church of Bangladesh, the first day of the New Year begins with a joyful parish communion service, one of the most well attended service of the year. A lovely tradition and everyone receives communion together before stepping out into another year of his grace. Thanks be to God for all his goodness towards us.

Sunday 9th January 2011 and a crack of dawn excited start for the new group going for their first four week rotation at our Khulna clinic, and for the seven girls who have returned back from a quick

121 George Street • Edinburgh EH2 4YN

t 0131 225 5722 f 0131 226 6121 e world@cofscotland.org.uk w www.churchofscotland.org.uk/worldmission
Charity Number: SC011353

PARTNER PLAN

visit home, and are now leaving for their first employment. Versatile Babu goes with the, and after a 12 hour drive we are relieved to hear that they have arrived safely. Subsequent calls have confirmed that they are very happy in their new employment. Please keep them and the rest of their group in your prayers. Thank you all for sponsoring them.

And on Monday January 10th 2011 a new group of girls arrive to replace them and soon the 17 seats are full, all have arrived eager to begin the coveted Bollobhpur Hospital training. The group includes four timid-looking Santali tribal girls from one of the poorest villages in the country, north of Rajshali. Four are Garo tribal girls from north of Dhaka. In contrast they look well and confident. Ivy comes from a neglected low lying swampy area near Barisal where annual flooding destroys crops and homes and also Joyanti from the same area who comes to us via the girls hostel that Bishop Mondol set up to help his own home village. The remaining seven are from local homes, namely Bollobhpur, Karpasdanga, Ratanpur and Nityanandapur, where we have out station clinics. There were some teething troubles, but thanks be to God all have settled down well and are studying, working and living together. And I forgot to mention Moyna, who is a new Christian, her father and family coming to the faith from Islam. Please keep them in your prayers and especially that Moyna be able to fit in with the group coming from such a difficult background from the Christian girls.

January 29th Saturday and Arun, Mithun and Robert gather in the office to sign for their Laboratory training certificates, for they have completed their eighteen month laboratory technician course and proved themselves competent, and passed the final examination successfully. Robert has no one and has been living with me. His mother died taking poison whilst he was still very small, his father died suddenly of a heat attack a few years ago, and his uncle (who was Silpi's husband) who was supporting him also died suddenly of a heart attack, leaving him adrift.

Praise God, Robert has already secured a job in a smallish village clinic. Please keep him and the others in your prayers.

Sunday January 30th and Bishop Mankin is here for the long awaited confirmation service, and seven of our girls are among those being confirmed. They include our Lolita who recently came to Christ from her Hindu background and was baptised into the Christian faith. Also six other girls who come from distant parishes with no resident parish priest, and have not had the opportunity to be confirmed previously. The church is packed for the three hours worship and young people from all the parishes in the deanery are confirmed. Pray God that our girls keep in touch with the church when they leave us for employment elsewhere. Often there is no nearby place of worship for them to attend.

February rushes by with all its routing activities. Change over for the girls in all the clinics, and a new senior laboratory student goes to help Kalpona in her clinic for a month and we fetch oxygen and supplies for the hospital and clinics.

February 17th & 18th brings the final anatomy and physiology examination for the second year group, and on Monday 21st February they begin Midwifery classes with me, always a coveted event. This group is keen and enthusiastic and it is a joy to teach them.

Saturday February 19th brought Asia, a living skeleton, to the ward. With her uncontrolled diabetes, her husband turned her out of the house on to the street. She would have died had she not had the courage to summon a passing cycle van and ask him to take her to Bollobhpur hospital – "If I can be taken to Bollobhpur I shall be safe". Praise God the cycle van driver had a kind heart, for the village is a long way away and Asia had no money to pay him. Since admission Asia has been started on insulin injections and was picking up her health when unfortunately she fell

PARTNER PLAN

and broke her hip. So Asia is on traction now and the girls are giving her nursing care. Thank God that we can care for such abandoned helpless people like Asia.

In a bed on the verandah area is Chikdana, a not-so-young women who has had many pregnancies but no live baby. She too heard about Bollobhpur Hospital and arrived here more than three months ago, to await the birth of her baby. She is now in the 33rd week of her pregnancy and is being held in prayer. Pray God that this time she be not disappointed.

Little Mitu, just three months old is a miracle of God's grace. She arrived in the middle of the night with her twin brother, grey and limp and no longer breathing due to the severity of her pneumonia. Mary and I prayed and resuscitated her, and Mary found a tiny vein through which she received antibiotics and intravenous feeding for a week, she being far to ill to be fed by tube or mouth. But God is gracious and little Mitu was eventually restored to her place in her mothers arms, and went home with her grateful parents fully breast feeding.

March has slipped away, and it is time to sign off and get a letter into the post to you all. Winter has suddenly been displaced by Spring, and the spring breeze are bringing the dry leaves cascading to form a crunchy carpet underfoot. For trees do not lose their leaves in autumn, they remain dry on the trees until spring dislodges them with its new green shoots, and the red cotton trees brilliant flowers are showing their beauty against the so blue sky.

And suddenly, as I bring my letter to a close on March 21st well not into Lent, the temperature has suddenly shot up into the 90's almost overnight and winter bedding is being aired in the sun on the hospital roof, ready for storing away for next winter, and no longer does anyone want to sit in the sun!

My three dogs have arrived to call me away from my writing, their midday meal of 'chapatiee' (bread) being long overdue!!

Thank you again for keeping alongside us with your interest and your prayers.

With greetings from us all.

