

PARTNER PLAN

An ecumenical appointment with:



Gillian Rose - Bangladesh October 2011

Bollobhpur Hospital
PO Kedargonj
District Meherpur
Bangladesh

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

Dear Friends in Scotland

Monday August 1st 2011 and I begin my letter to a background of wind and rain, as our monsoon rains continue unabated. The country is washed and clean, with rice fields green to the horizon, and beautiful constantly changing cloud patterns above, as rain gives way to sunshine for brief periods, and I look in vain for a rainbow, which I have not seen in years! In the brief sunshine periods, the girls rush out with the hospital washing to try and get something dry, and at night the night nurses have the extra task of drying wet washing under the fans as the patients sleep.



As I mentioned in my last letter, the roof of the maternity, labour ward and female ward is being dismantled, indeed we are open to the sky now, and the shuttering planks are being put in place, ready for the new roof to be constructed. Our patients are scattered in different places in the meantime, and our girls can be seen, umbrellas over their heads, skirts tucked up, wading along muddy paths to care for their patients and deliver their babies in the makeshift labour room created out of a staff room in the nurses home.

And it has been a busy month for new arrivals too, and the "maternity ward", large and spacious in the classroom and adjoining room on the ground floor of the nurses home, has been full, and the new 'case nurses' happy and busy.



And although the classroom is occupied, classes continue, and the girls' dining room becomes the temporary classroom, with the skeleton grinning at them as they eat their rice! Staff Nurse Hannah Khan, who is responsible for the Anatomy and Physiology classes, is busily preparing the new 2nd Year group for their final examination, And the group are keen, studying well into the night, eager to pass their examinations, and be able to start their midwifery classes with me.

Tuesday August 2nd brought the first day of Ramadan, the annual fasting month for the Muslim community, when they fast from dawn till dusk, not even drinking any water, and do all their eating during the night hours. No small feat in this sort of

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climate, with high temperatures and humidity, causing copious sweating all day long, and fluid loss from the body. Many fall ill, and we have hospital admissions with stomach pains and vomiting due to the fasting.

Monday August 8th 2011 and in a torrential rainstorm, thirteen new girls arrive with bedding, bags and boxes to commence their three year training with us. I've deliberately called them a month late, as space is short in the Nurses home now, but we have tucked them into a room alongside the mothers and babies on the ground floor, and they are now fitting themselves in and getting to know each other. Rani and Bahamoni, who you will remember stayed on after the entrance examination in May, now join the group making fifteen in all. One girl failed to turn up and we learn that she has decided to go to college for further studies rather than come here.

They are a mixed group with Rupali, Amy, Moni and Hira coming from the Garo Tribal community in the north of the country, Bahamoni is alone this time from the Santal Tribe in the Rajchahi area. Anjoli comes from the railway town of Saidpur right in the north of the country. Liza, Sonia, Monju, Mukta and Tuli are from the low-lying villages in the south of the country. Topoti has recently come to Christ from Hinduism and was baptised only a few months ago. Anjuna is a well-educated girl from a very poor Hindu home in the south who has been given a chance with us. Pray God she finds Christ during her three years with us. That leaves Rani and Ishita, the only two from local homes, Rani from Nityanandapur and Ishita from Karpasdanga. Please keep them in your prayers as they commence their Preliminary Training school (3 months) and Staff Nurse Hannah Mondol as she teaches them. I enclose a photograph of them studying in the make shift classroom.

Thursday August 11th and another beautiful flower blooming on my Night Queen cactus plant, drawing everyone to gaze in awe at its beauty and scent, Bibhu, the girls' night guard, opening the grill of the Nurses home at midnight to let them out.

Saturday 13th August brings our monthly Community health meeting, community health staff coming in from the clinics to bring their monthly reports and share and learn together. During the month each clinic has invited 60 women for our afternoon "learning together" session. The sessions have been greatly enjoyed and the women enthusiastic for more, and we plan a second session in two months time.

Village women have very little variety in their lives, Muslim and Hindu women especially. Christian women can come to church on Sundays and weekdays in Lent and can attend the weekly Women's Union meeting, or the 'Golden Age programme' meetings for the elderly. So women especially enjoy something different, and to get out of their homes for a while and meet others. And this time we divided them up into five small groups for group discussion and they wrote down their findings (some of them can read and write, but not all) and a group leader afterwards presented their findings to the meeting. Creative indeed, the main subjects this time were personal and home and family hygiene and child care. Important subjects for a village community.

We are again grateful to CARITAS for assisting with funding for these sessions.

The sessions are attended by our trained village midwives, who work alongside us in our care of women during pregnancy and childbirth. They are the ones who cannot read or write!!

Primary school dropout is still too high in Bangladesh, over 20% at a recent reporting. And not all children go to school either. I booked a nicely dressed young woman at Ratanpur clinic last week, expecting her first baby. When I asked her to which class she had read in school (many never complete high school, they are taken out of school and married off very young, sometimes even from primary school) she promptly said – "Oh I never went to school!!" And the government is battling to create a literate Bangladesh within a few years!!

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Friday 19th August brings the monthly “all change” around the clinics for our girls (students). The newest group of “call-nurses” are staffing the clinics at the moment, learning to care for and deliver the mothers in a village setting. Today I pick up two girls from our clinic at Karpasdanga where they have finished their four week stint, and take them to our clinic at Kejura for their second four weeks. Two laboratory students are with me, as more than 40 patients are waiting at the clinic for us, and many of them need laboratory tests. We are in a “hired” car, as our hospital micro has become too expensive to run, and will be sold. Hopefully we will be able to have a diesel run micro for hospital uses in the future.

Saturday 20th August finds me at our Nityanandapur village clinic in the afternoon, with two excited first year girls for their first “village duty” and Sunday 21st August and an early start with a car load of girls and boys heading for the clinic in Khulna which we help to run. Four girls will be on duty there for a month, two senior girls for the running of the clinic and two new 1st year girls to help disabled Kalpona in her daily living. A senior student from the laboratory also stays for a month to work alongside Kalpona in her little laboratory. The clinic has funding problems and most of the staff have been terminated. Reba, who is in charge of the clinic now has to work alone, and her husband Arthur has found work elsewhere. Kalpona is alone inside with our Bollobhpur students and the having to take responsibility has been good for her. Pray God some funding becomes available for the work, especially thinking of Kalpona – for this little laboratory is her lifeline and the small salary she receives, all that she has in this world. She has no one who can take care of her as our girls do, and her elderly father and mother in their poverty stricken village have no means to provide for her should her laboratory be closed. Please keep Kalpona, Reba and the clinic in your prayers.

An ex-laboratory student Ratan, has come with me for the day, and we go into the main bazaar area to shop for medical supplies, buy a roll of rexine for the patients beds (now very expensive!), collect some trade price sandals for our hospital shop, visit the CARITAS office, finally returning to the clinic at 5pm for a quick “midday meal” then back on the road to Bollobhpur with the returning girls, dropping them off at Karpasdanga clinic on the way for their next months assignment.

How quickly the months pass by indeed!!

Tuesday 23rd August and the hospital compound is abuzz with activity, for the shuttering planks and the rods are all in place, and today our long-awaited new roof is to be constructed. Liton, the contractor has arrived. A group of energetic looking young men have arrived with a cement mixer, rough bamboo ladders have been constructed from ground to roof, and soon the mixer is churning out what is to be the new roof, and the young men are bearing baskets full on their heads to the waiting team on the roof and the work begins.

Tuesday is clinic day at Karpasdanga, and I have to be off with the team of girls and the laboratory students with Laboratory Technician Michael in charge of them, and the boot of the car is full of medicines. For Karpasdanga is our busiest clinic, and we see and treat over 90 general patients, while more than one hundred women are having their antenatal check-up with Clinic in charge Benuka, and Nomina who has come with the team to help.

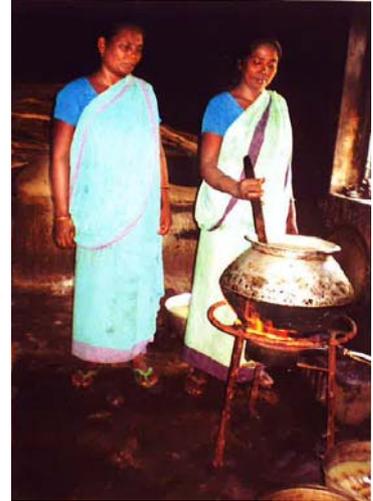
We return after 5pm to find the machine still whirring and the mixture still being borne up to the roof, with Dibakor, our hospital administrator tirelessly overseeing the proceedings.

I have a midwifery class to take at 6pm, and we return at 7.30pm to see the last baskets being borne aloft and the roof complete. Thanks be to God.

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The shuttering will be removed after a month and inside and outside plastering done. Then the painting and white-washing and electrical works and then at last we will be back to normal. How grateful we all are to our generous friends in Scotland whose grant via the central office is making this possible for us. We thank God for you all.

Wednesday 23rd August 2011 and the news of the month is that our Biogas plant is complete, a stove and stand installed, and the girls cooks, Shopna and Ruth can be found in the mornings cooking a cauldron of “kedgeree” (rice and dhal/lentils and vegetables) for everyone’s breakfast – “everyone” meaning the 75 girls in the Nurses home plus the Grannies and Granddads on the geriatric ward and sometimes patients whose food does not come from home. So this is a real blessing and a boon, and is helping to cut down dramatically on firewood, and we are pleased. A normal household would be able to cook their three meals a day on the stove. Our numbers however are too large to allow this. But morning breakfast is cooked every day and some evenings, the evening rice and vegetable curry meal is cooked too, meaning that the wood fire need only be lit once a day. It gives me great joy to have been able to do this, and grateful thanks to again to friends whose generosity has made it possible, friends in Scotland again who are always so generous, and to Dorothy at St Paul’s Chippenham, Wiltshire, whose inspiration and interest in “green” technology has spurred me on. So we now have solar lighting, biogas and hot water “free of costs” and I thank God daily for his goodness.



Sunday September 4th and the rain and storms still with us. We are well into the “green season” in the churches year, with Easter a distant memory and Christmas on the distant horizon. The parish church is still adorned with the white decorations put up for Easter, with nobody bothering to take them down!! This happens after the Christmas season also, with the streamers and balloons hurriedly being removed the day before Lent begins and the church is being prepared for the Ash Wednesday service!!

Thursday and Friday 8th and 9th September and the new 2nd year group sit their final Anatomy and Physiology exams and it is good to be able to report that all did well and have now commenced their midwifery classes with me. They are a good group, keen and reliable.

Tuesday 13th September and the workmen have returned from their Eid holidays (the festival that marks the end of the month of fasting) the skirting boards and bamboo supports are being removed and the plastering begun. So we begin to see light at the end of the tunnel!

On the wards the theme of the month seems to be ‘poisoning’ – attempted suicide – with case after case arriving, and the girls competently washing them out and caring for them afterwards. And although there has been no major break out of cholera or diarrhoea this year in the area, cases of diarrhoea, many with life threatening dehydration, have been arriving regularly, and again our students become adept at managing them and rehydrating them with both oral and intravenous saline.

Small new arrivals are occupying the incubators and the maternity ward has remained busy. A team goes out from the hospital each day, to provide antenatal care for women in their own villages, so there is no woman in the area who does not have access to care during her pregnancy.

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September 16th & 17th brought change day for the girls in the different clinics and Sunday 18th found us on our way to Khulna at dawn, for the changeover there and to spend time with Kalpona, and to shop for supplies and refill the oxygen cylinders.

Monday September 26th and another crack of dawn start this time for the senior girls on their way to the Baptist Mission hospital at Joyramkura, for their three months training in Operation Theatre techniques and surgical nursing, relieving their friends who have completed their training and return to complete the last three months of their training here before leaving us at the end of December.

Sunday October 2nd 2011 and a pause to give my dogs their Sunday bath before finishing my letter to you. Tom is big now and wary of Sunday baths, but I managed to catch him unsuspecting!! His mother, known at 'Tom's Ma' was run over by a medicine company van at the hospital gate a few days ago, but is slowly recovering. She has had many skirmishes with death.

And as I come to a close, the sun is hot and bright, bedding and crops and jute fibre are out in the sun drying, and the rain seems to be a thing of the past.

I hope you too are enjoying a beautiful autumn with its changing colours.

With greetings from us all.

