Britain-Nepal Otology Service (BRINOS) wins twice at BMJ 2013 Awards

Report by: Hannah Blanchford, MBBS MRes MRCS(ENT), Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle, UK.

The BMJ awards are said to celebrate the best in British healthcare. The Britain Nepal Otology Service (BRINOS) was honoured to receive two prestigious awards at this year’s ceremony in London.

The Karen Woo Surgical Team of the Year award was inspired by the work of Karen Woo, a British surgeon providing humanitarian aid in rural Afghanistan where she was tragically killed in 2010. BRINOS was presented with this accolade for its services to people in Nepal over the past 25 years. BRINOS was founded in 1988 by Neil Weir, a British otologist who was inspired by the then sole Nepali ear surgeon Dr Rakesh Prasad. Neil Weir responded to his vision by providing surgeons and equipment for ‘ear camps’. The work of BRINOS includes over 4000 major ear operations as well as training community ear assistants (CEAs) to diagnose and treat ear disease. The CEAs have in turn trained volunteer ear care assistants, who have educated 16,000 local villagers on the causes and prevention of ear disease. Despite the resource-poor setting and enormous burden of ear disease, BRINOS continues to achieve remarkable outcomes for patients treated in its ear camps.

BRINOS was particularly honoured to win the coveted BMJ Medical Team of the Year award out of 63 shortlisted teams. This award recognises ‘outstanding health gain for patients and involves talented individuals working together to create excellence in healthcare’. The judges were impressed not only by the longevity of the organisation, but also by their outcomes and health promotion in local communities.

BRINOS continues to raise funds in order to build an Ear Care Centre in Nepalgunj, in the southwest of Nepal. The centre is due to open in 2014 and will ensure that people in Nepal continue to have access to sustainable ear care for generations to come.

Please see http://www.brinos.org.uk/ for details of BRINOS and how to support it.

Audiology at Ear Aid Nepal 2013, Chainpur

Date: April 5th-20th, 2013. Report by: Joy Rosenberg, Clinical Scientist, Mary Hare Training Services; Jenny Griffin, Audiologist, Manchester Royal Infirmary; David Blakeman, Trainee Clinical Scientist, Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals, UK.

‘Swa swa sunena.’ At least one of us could have been heard intoning this oft-repeated audiometric instruction in our sleep. Understandable considering that in seven days of ear camp 595 patients were seen (118 surgeries, 254 audiological assessments, 75 hearing aid fittings and 460 dental appointments). International Nepal Fellowship (http://www.inf.org/ear-hospital) and Ear Aid Nepal (www.earaidnepal.org) organise these camps twice yearly under the leadership of Mike Smith, Hereford ENT consultant. Sustainability for this service is the focus of the soon-to-be built ear training hospital in Pokhara. The camps are staffed not only by the visiting UK team of ENT surgeons, anaesthetists, audiologists, scrub nurses and dentists, but also by a Nepali team of managers, nurses, orderlies, drivers, engineers and interpreters.

Armed with donated earmoulds, hearing aids and fitting kits, as well as EarAid Nepal’s audiometric and insta-mold kit, we flew to rural western Nepal and drove 13 hours to Chainpur, Bajhang District Hospital in the western Himalayas, where we set up clinic in bare cement rooms.

Testing in ambient noise never less than 55 dB was only one of several challenges. Our gestures and learned Nepali instructional phrases were useful, but didn’t go far towards establishing the initial notion of communicative ability that is so important to our rehabilitation-oriented profession. However, being resourceful people working with resourceful patients, we were able to overcome many of these obstacles in the very short time we had.

Apparently profuse thank yous are not prevalent in Nepali culture, but we saw gratitude in the smiles and ‘Namaste’ greetings when hearing aids were fitted or in the queue of 118 post-op patients on the last day.

Ear camp will return to Nepal in November, and new volunteers are welcome. We have taken with us not only the profound sense of having been able to give something back, but our own personal reflections on adaptability, sustainability, respect towards the people we served and gratitude towards the many individuals who supported and encouraged us in making the journey.

Joy Rosenberg, Jenny Griffin and David Blakeman.

Angus Waddell, Tikajyt Gurung and John Skipper with the two awards which they received on behalf of BRINOS.

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