



The life and service of Dr Barnabas Murmu

Dr Barnabas Murmu was the Medical Superintendent St Lukes Hospital Hiranpur June 1990 to April 2020

He was a warm, gentle and modest man who lived a life of service, never having ambitions to climb a career ladder or to place himself above others. He is remembered by many, with gratitude to God and with much respect and affection. Barnabas was a conscientious and

helpful colleague in hospital, as well as a supportive church member, taking his turn to preach, and lead worship and prayer meetings.

There is an article remembering Dr Murmu on the website.

Dear Everyone,

Since our last late Spring newsletter in May, Shubhro and I have only been at St Luke's in spirit rather than physically.

You may remember us telling you then, that we had started "practicing" consulting with patients from a distance over WhatsApp while still sitting in St Luke's, in the week leading up to our departure towards the end of April.



Like many around the world we have been delighted in how people have adapted to this - and we have been grateful to God for allowing the technology to keep working enabling us to be in daily communication with St Lukes, Prem Jyothi, Miriampahar, (Holy Cross Hospital) Hathimara (run under the able leadership of Sister Suma) and other nurse led clinics and hospitals in Jharkhand.

India has now passed the 230th day of lockdown. We have a friend called Lindsay who from the first day of lockdown, faithfully sends a flower from Jharkhand every day on her morning walk. This is a special way to keep in contact, and both she, and all of us she sends a flower to, have discovered what an amazing array of beautiful plants and flowers there are in Jharkhand. If any of you are interested please go to the picture gallery in the website.

Patient numbers have dropped off at St Luke's, but they continue to grow in other places.

We have been so grateful to other clinicians both from here in the UK, and also in India who have given of their time when we have called to discuss the more complex patients. Knowing when to refer

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Have you seen an image like this before ?



Covid and lockdown and zoom calls are but a few of the new words in our vocabulary, but they have no barrier of language the world over. And people everywhere have reacted to covid in much the same way - mostly in fear. Just as people have a fear of terminal illness, so they have feared being given this diagnosis of covid. And covid has been no respecter of persons - rich and poor, celebrities and ordinary folk have succumbed. There has been immense suffering everywhere, but also stories of miraculous recovery. One of the greatest sufferings which affected the rural poor in India in a tragic way was where family members were working hundreds of miles away when lockdown struck (*Read the Migrant poem on our webpage*) Almost every village in Jharkhand will have several families with one member working far away from home, and sending all they earn back to the village.

We shall relate to you some of the patient stories from St Lukes and other hospitals during lockdown, and these can be found on the website. We only have been able to be part of these stories as a result of the people we left behind, and the development and improvement in the technology in Jharkhand.



Elisabeth and Shubhro can still give advice for patients over WhatsApp,

and are grateful that Michael is still there in the office, and has been able to remain in contact with us for any patient who happens to visit St Luke's Hospital. And we are grateful that Haridas

(pictured) is there daily when called to do any investigation. Patient numbers have fallen steeply, but some occasionally present themselves. *Continued on page 3*

Dr Joni

Sad news yet so thankful for her months of service
It was no co-incidence that Joni was able to return from lockdown (where she had been with her parents since March) just less than a week before Umama and Sadique left St Luke's. None of us arranged it that way - so it was another encouragement to us that God was in control. And Joni took up her role well - just where she left off - and we were delighted, as were patients.



Photo: Joni with a man who presented with fever and breathing difficulties.

But our joy was shortlived - for less than a week after Joni returned she developed very painful swelling of both her ankles, so that it was difficult for her to weightbear or walk. Joni had no fever or other clinical signs to help with a diagnosis - and we were at a loss to explain. Shubhro suggested painkillers and a combination of rest, elevation compression

bandage and exercise, and there was improvement. But on Sunday 30th August Joni experienced a severe flare up of swelling and pain - so severe, she was unable to walk at all.

She literally was crawling on her hands and knees from her bedroom to the bathroom and kitchen. And she felt very alone - Premlata had gone home for the weekend, and Michael did not answer his phone when she called him 3 times. Joni did not have the numbers of any one else on the campus, so she phoned her parents, and they asked her to call a taxi and come home straight away. Joni sent a voice message to me in Shetland while she was in the taxi on her way home, and I returned a call reassuring her she had made a right decision.

Since then Joni has seen an Orthopaedic Consultant and a Rheumatologist, and has had numerous investigations. We are thankful there is no evidence of malignancy or chronic disease such as TB, and nor is there any autoimmune disease. But Joni remains without a diagnosis.

Her pain and swelling respond to analgesia and exercise, and recently she has started doing back exercises as well. She will be awaiting MRI investigations which will be done when she reaches South India. Over these few weeks at home she has had time to reflect, and taken advice from her family and mentors and has sadly come to the decision that she will never return to St Lukes.

We are so grateful for the several months of dedicated work that Joni gave to men, women and children who came to St Lukes. Joni only joined us on 7th December 2019, but we felt we had known her for longer, and she is going to be sadly missed.

We want to acknowledge and thank too our friends who have supported Joni financially, enabling us to give her the same salary she would have got in any government setting. .

Premlata - more sad news

We were just as sad when Premlata decided to leave just a fortnight after Joni (see above). Although Susanna and Jyothi, our two senior experienced nurses give patients excellent care, and are greatly respected, their age has stopped them carrying on their service since corona virua came to India.

They are sitting in their rooms on campus, and the temptation would be to call them back to the hospital, but we know this would put them at risk. Apart from Susanna and Jyothi only Premlata has some experience in looking after antenatal women, and she was becoming better all the time, so when she left it was a big blow for everyone. Now there is only one nursing aid left - Kamlini, and she is steadfast in her observations of patients, but has never looked after the many pregnant ladies who make up the majority of women and girls who attend St Lukes.

Photo: Premlata takes the height and weight measurement of one of her antnatal girls.



Snakes Alive!

From Sister Harshita at Holy Cross Hospital
Nursing Sisters at Holy Cross are seeing patients daily but numbers dropped off as people stayed away for varying reasons, and probably the main one being transport or the cost of transport. Although some road transport has restarted, the cost has rocketed and this has come at a time when families have to decide whether they eat, or whether they spend money on their health.

Whereas you used to be able to share an auto with anything up to 14 people - roof included it cost 20 rupees - it's now costing well over 100 rupees per person - even if they are stuck up there on the roof of the auto. So if they don't have money for food for the day - they are never going to pay 2-300 rupees (at least one or two family go along with the snake victim) And as a result of their decision more people dying of snake bite. More people have suffered from hunger than covid - but the snakes still lurk in the grass.



unless you can reach a hospital like Holy Cross, where nurses are skilled in ventilating patients (the poison is a neurotoxin which paralyses the muscles which allow us to breathe. The toxin starts from the head down, so the first thing a person feels is they cannot keep their eyes open - the eyelids droop and when this happens the whole family including the patient, even the children know that it is only a matter of time before they won't be able to breathe. If they can reach Holy Cross Hospital, the nurses go straight into action - start a drip with the anti snake venom, observe

and record the heart rate , breathing rate, blood pressure and most importantly talk to the victim who is usually terrified.

If the anti venom can act in time, the patient will not need ventilated, but if their breathing becomes shallow then Sister Christy puts a tube into the breathing pipe and uses a bag called an Ambu bag which is squeezed by hand every 3 minutes, and so breathes for the patient.

Photo:Our night guards spotted and killed this snake in the residential area of the St Lukes campus

When a poisonous snake bites there is little hope for survival

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a patient on to a higher centre has even more connotations than it did before the virus came. Some of the stories with pictures and video clips can be seen in the patient stories section of the website. We have changed the names of patients.

Protection from COVID of the staff living on St Lukes Hospital Campus.

We give thanks for good health and freedom from covid in our staff community on site, and especially for James Susanna and Jyoti our oldest staff at 80, 77 and 75 respectively. We also thank God for protecting the staff of Prem Jyothi Hospital, Holy Cross Hospital, Sister Suma and her staff at Hathimara Hospital, Lindsay and her staff in a small hospital in western Jharkhand and our dear friend Marcette who works with children in the many Santhal villages in Jharkhand, but also supports the Roman Catholic missionaries all across India. **We thank God for keeping all these people well, and for healing those who have suffered covid symptoms and come through this.**

Whats App and Haridas combine

Haridas has taken up extra responsibility in leading the morning devotions in the hospital. (pictured here taking blood from a pregnant woman)

He is in the laboratory every day - excepting Sundays, and people from Hiranpur and the surrounding areas know that they will not be turned away from St Lukes during this pandemic.

If Haridas is unable to do an investigation himself, he has an arrangement with a technician in Pakur, and communicates via WhatsApp to get the report as soon as possible.

Haridas has grown in his Christian faith and also in his general responsibility of care to patients.

One morning Haridas, when walking from his quarters to the laboratory came across a young man

in the hospital compound who had seemingly collapsed, and was not responding.

Haridas saw the urgency of the situation, and helped the boy's friend to organise transport to get the sick boy to the District Government Hospital in Pakur. We heard later that the boy had died in hospital, but the family were grateful that they were alerted and able to go with him to the hospital. During covid, many young people have died with no apparent explanation, but one of the saddest things for families is to hear this news and just be handed the lifeless body of their relative. The grieving process is helped when the family know they did everything in their power to help.



Ambulance for St Luke's dream realised

The idea for the ambulance sprung from the story of the young girl operated on in St Luke's who had to be transferred post-operatively to Prem Jyothi Hospital to recover. It was almost impossible to find a vehicle or driver to agree to take an unconscious child on that journey, but it happened, and the child recovered - she was suffering from tuberculosis which had eroded deep into the bone in her chest.

Shortly after hearing this, friends (who wish to remain anonymous) were celebrating their Ruby Wedding Anniversary. Instead of celebrating in usual style, they decided to have a ceilidh and asked friends and family to celebrate their special day with them and donate something towards an ambulance for St Luke's Hospital. They were amazed and delighted to raise over a thousand pounds, and this got the ambulance fund off to an amazing start. Others joined in, including Sanjeev Dayal, one of Shubhros close friends from CMC Ludhiana and Sarenga days. Then in the summer Mearns Castle Church in Glasgow made a special appeal, and many folk gave generously. Finally just a couple of months ago Lerwick Baptist Church gave a generous donation which realised the sum for the ambulance.

Mental Health Clinic

Just as in the UK, mental health services have been reduced during the pandemic, and people have been dying through suicide and for other reasons. In India suicides have risen, but sometimes people have died simply because they cannot access their medication, for there is no one to prescribe it. And so it was, that with much determination and perseverance Lindsay got a mental health clinic off the ground.

Prior to covid the Consultant Psychiatrist would come from Ranchi once a month. And on the day men women and children would come with their mental health issues. But there was no appointment system - patients and their families would gather from 5-6 am on clinic day, the the Psychiatric team would see all patients, however long it took.

Before the pandemic, all of us who have worked in India did not think it would ever be possible to have an appointment system - simply not culturally acceptable or understood.

Now we know differently.

People were contacted by mobile phone, and requested to arrive only half an hour before their appointment slot. For they would have to stay outside the hospital gates until 5 minutes before their slot. And strict social distancing and wearing of masks had to be maintained even outside the hospital gate. It has taken several weeks, but now this appointment system is working well in the mental health clinic, and it is even working in the antenatal clinics for return patients. A year ago, we would have wondered what sort of miracle it would take for rural Indians to accept an appointment system. We could never have envisaged that "miracle" would be a pandemic. And so it was we received this message message from Lindsay one morning.

"Mental health clinic in the time of covid-19. Telemedicine partnership with Central Institute of psychiatry, Ranchi. Started today in our clinic."

Prayer changes things!

Prayer points and thanksgiving

So much of what you will read in our newsletter is cause for prayer and thanksgiving...and space doesn't allow us to list everything from the past few months.

Compared to other parts of Jharkhand our migrant workers and students studying hundreds of miles away returned late into the epidemic. So they - and the villages they returned to were prepared for their return. We are thankful for our local government leaders who had thoughtfully planned, and learned from the chaos and tragedy seen elsewhere in India.

Local District government designated empty buildings where these people were able to isolate for two weeks. Rice, lentils and vegetables together with cooking facilities were supplied and also a clean drinking water and bathing water supply. This system worked well - those returning felt cared for, rather than rejected as infectious lepers. This gave them a further two weeks to be away from family, but time to reflect in a safe environment, and to look forward to being reunited. Government carried out covid testing on them after entering Jharkhand, and the few who were positive on entry were taken to a designated district hospital to be kept in isolation.

Increasing opposition to the boundary fence construction

Progress with the boundary fence for St Luke's with team led by Munshi, who is wise and gentle, but firm and fair in his leadership role. There are now nearly 350 steel poles and 50 cement pillars in the ground at 7 foot intervals around the perimeter of the St Luke's Hospital campus.

But just like Nehemiah, there has been - and is - much opposition - and nobody has come to help, though we have asked for their help. It is heavy work - all the steel pillars have to be embedded in concrete, made on sight by the boys themselves. The ground is hard and full of rocks and stones, and although there is a special machine to help dig the holes, the loosening of the harder rocks and boulders needs to be done with a pick axe by hand. The holes have to be at least 3 feet deep, and all the steel poles and concrete pillars have to stand at the same height above the ground. Munshi is carrying much responsibility on his shoulders, and when he does a job, he does it well. Shubhro is advising from a distance now, but we are continually amazed that this team of boys have no experience of working in construction. But they are persevering, in spite of discouragements.

You know from previous newsletters there have been many things which have stopped the work - lack of sand, lack of cement and it seemed when covid struck that was the last straw, but no, the work has continued. 75% of the boundary now has the steel poles and concrete pillars firmly embedded in three feet of concrete underground. More attack and discouragement came in early August, when people came and stole several poles sawing them off at their base, thus rendering them useless, and making it well nigh impossible to replace but we are working on that.



photo: Kevin Greenfield

We are presently sponsoring John who completed his 1st Year B.Com during lockdown

Studying nearly 2 thousand miles away with no means of transport to return, John and Marcus and another friend from Jharkhand had to wait for several months before coming home.

They normally take the 50 hour train journey south, but these trains have been grounded in the past 9 months of lockdown. So John and his friends had a new experience - they were flown back home in August.

And from the end of August John has been studying online for the 2nd year of his degree. We took the opportunity of asking John to return to St Lukes, since this enables him to get the internet access to download lectures, and do the frequent tests required. And John, with his youth and quick reactions has become one of our night guards.

Marcus, John's best friend, who also volunteered with us briefly in 2018 lives in a small remote village on top of a hill, and has had no opportunity to access any lectures - in fact there is not even a 'phone signal. We asked John to travel to Marcus village and offer to bring him to stay in St Luke's also, and spend all his time catching up on the lectures he has missed since August.

From amazon delivery boy to Optometrist.

One day the boy delivering an amazon package to St Lukes had a longer chat than usual with Shubhro. The eventual outcome of that conversation is that Subal has given up his job with Amazon and is training to become an Optometrist. We are so grateful to Prof. Mukherji, (the eye surgeon who has operated regularly at St Luke's) for his willingness to train Subal. Subal will have a full time job with eye testing patients in St Luke's and screening the older population, unable to come to SLH from surrounding villages. Subal will be Prof. Mukherji's Optometrist for the Hiranpur area, and with this vital communication in place we should be able to offer a service not presently available. Instead of arriving on his motor bike to deliver an amazon package to this home, Subal will be arriving to deliver an eye test.