



## The best laid plans...

### When everything is changing it's sometimes better not to make plans but to listen.

Many of you are aware that we had been due to fly back to Scotland on 15th April, since Elisabeth was having eye surgery on 16th and 20th April. However, as March wore on we felt we should stay on in India, since from mid-March no international flights were being allowed back into India.

So we contacted both Shetland and Dumfries and explained we would not be coming to work there in the near future.

Then we saw an eye surgeon in Malda - just over the border in West Bengal, and he kindly agreed to operate. But before he could so, India went into lockdown. Then we were told by the British Embassy, who were trying to trace all British Nationals, of a potential flight from Kolkata to the UK but, if and when that came about there would only be one flight, so we should seriously consider taking it.

We were still unsure whether we should be staying or leaving, and all the time felt we were not able to practice in the kind of way we have always been used to. And, if we did, we were putting ourselves and our staff at risk. Subtle changes to the way we saw patients were introduced, as we tried to balance what was best for patients with what was safe. It was so very difficult for patients and their relatives to understand, so they found it difficult to do the kind of things we were suggesting.

Then with the increasing restrictions imposed through lockdown we had to come to a decision about whether to return to Scotland if the opportunity was given to us.

We prayed, asking God to make it very clear, by opening doors which seemed to be closed, if He wanted us to return here. But, I think deep down we were feeling that would almost certainly mean we were going to stay in Hiranpur.

One of our faithful prayer friends here in UK had a vision that we would be brought back, but she said "It will happen very suddenly, so you need to be ready to go at any point" And that is exactly what happened - a car and driver arrived at 11pm one night saying simply, "I have been sent to bring you to Kolkata". He was exhausted and hungry, having been 12 hours on the road with a three hour grilling from police at the State border.

So we cooked dinner, made up a bed in the spare room and planned to set out in the morning for Kolkata - Atanu, the driver was relieved. We messaged one or two family and friends, and Sheena (who had been with us only weeks before) 'phoned to say the previous night she had an odd dream: "Lis was in the kitchen in the night cooking food for a stranger who had come out of the blue" God is kind - even when we do not have dreams and visions from Him, when our friends do, and tell us, it's like He is confirming, "This is the way - go in it"

And we are so grateful to the many who prayed constantly, people whom we do not know and whom we will probably never meet - you know who you are if ever you read this and we say thank you.



Dear Everyone,

We have been writing this letter over the last three months, as life has been changing on an almost daily basis. So the majority of this was written in Hiranpur, but now penning it from Scotland where we returned late on night of 20th April. So for this newsletter we shall give you an idea of what a day in St Luke's is like now, and of the changes we have made to our practice.

As we write this Spring newsletter to you we have had our first daffodils in Hiranpur.

We brought bulbs back in December 2018, but they failed to thrive. But we tried again, planting them a bit earlier in December 2019 and some have come up with more on the way.

Flowers are such a blessing in the

midst of the sadness and death we see around us.

This letter comes to you with our love and prayer and grateful thanks for your prayers, more especially in these recent weeks, when we have been conscious of folk praying.

We were so moved by the story of Dr Li Wen Liang, the doctor who discovered the corona virus, and was arrested when he chose to spread awareness about the virus and in the process paid with his life.



We continue to pray for his parents, his widow who may have given birth to their second child, and also his young daughter now without her daddy.

We know many of you already know the story of Li Wen Liang, but we have uploaded it on the St Lukes website as a tribute to a man of God who did not shrink from loving and serving his 'neighbours'.



Weekly staff meetings co-incide with prophylactic medicine day for all retired staff These meetings gave everyone an opportunity to ask questions and let them voice fears. But the main aim of the meetings was to explain to staff changes we were making and where their role lay from a day to day basis.

# Midwives and the Nutrition Centre at St Luke's

**Karen and Jean - midwives from UK visit us at St Lukes, and also spend time with the nursing and medical staff at PJH.**

It is no co-incidence that the normal delivery rate has increased in PJH, just with the couple of days Karen and Jean spent with the midwives there.

We are of the strong persuasion that the midwives need to be more supported to take decisions for themselves to look after the normal labouring patients. They need the support, either from experienced midwives like Karen and Jean - 'We are of the strong persuasion that a mother having her baby should be as non-medicalised as possible, and that midwives should be supported to do this Our midwives can learn from experienced midwives like Karen and Jean'

Our hope and plan is to renovate a wing of the present Womens Hospital to accommodate women and one carer who are coming from far so that it doesn't matter if they are in latent labour for a few days, or if their BP raised mildly and we want to monitor them as day patients. These concepts are so well understood by midwives in the West, but they will take time to instill in the Indian psyche - in midwives, nurses, doctors and the women and their families. I have a vision



*Karen and Jean are fantastic midwives, but also fantastic cooks*

that we can do this, but we need the help of like minded folk.

I also told Karen and Jean about my vision of the nutrition centre - this is still very much part our my dream.

We have the potential here to grow all sorts of organic produce, to feed especially adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women a good diet and supervise their Iron, calcium vit D by DOTS on site at the time of the free meal. This, and the regular education we could offer through TV screen videos in Hindi would go a long way to improving their health and wellbeing.

The sad thing is that much of this was in the Indian psyche, and so called Western civilisation and "medicalisation" of pregnancy and childbirth has destroyed it. I feel the medical profession are mainly responsible, and therefore we shall not be able to correct it. We need midwives to teach midwives, and our role will only be to support the midwives, who will then teach a new generation of Indian midwives to carry on the message.

There is only one Institution in India (Fernandez Hospital) which trains midwives, and has doctors who support the concept of midwifery led care. If Karen and Jean can persuade their interested friends - both midwives and advanced neonatal nurse practitioners to come out to St Luke's, then this concept of midwifery led care could take root again in - not only St Luke's, but other low resource mission hospitals across India.

**Our vision is to have regular visits - maybe from 3-6 months of retired or folk willing to take short sabbaticals - and have a rota of midwives coming to St Luke's - staying in the Sisters Bungalow here, and supervising, teaching and supporting in-service training of our local girls - and older staff.**

## Dr Joni

We had been praying for a doctor to support Joni during our absences in the UK Having St Luke's open during our absence will make a big difference to the momentum.



*Dr Joni teaching Shiwanthi and Anthony ABC*

The majority of our patients attending for outpatient care can be dealt with by our capable nursing staff, but patients in India are not happy, unless they see a doctor. Joni is a good listener and will fulfil that role very well. She will still be able to contact Shubhro and Elisabeth through Whatsapp, just as she has been doing

when we are in outlying clinics here.

With this in mind we were excited and delighted when a retired doctor couple heard about St Luke's through the CMAI (Christian Medical Association of India). Dr Tigga and Dr Mary - both from a tribal background met each other at Medical College and after qualifying were married. Both of them spent many years in both Government service and Christian Mission Hospitals, so when they expressed interest to come and work with us we felt this must be God's plan. Their children are grown up and independent - they have no longer elderly parents to care for - in their own words they were "free agents", and although retired were both fit and well. We could imagine them supporting and covering Dr Joni while we were not here.

Dr Tigga and Mary visited one Sunday in the midst of the chaos of Sunday school. Shubhro spent time with them going around the hospital, and then they had a meal with us, and we discussed many things. We had thought they were going to

stay overnight, but they were keen to get on the road again - and so we said goodbye. They seemed very positive - choosing the bungalow they would like to stay in etc but then we never heard from them! And then came COVID-19, and we can see God's wisdom in Tigga and Mary not being His choice for St Luke's at this time.

And then Joni went home for the weekend - the weekend before the 'lockdown' So she got stuck at home and has not been able to return. But we do pray, in His time Joni will be able to rejoin us.

## INTERNATIONAL PHONE CALL APPOINTMENTS

In the meantime there has been a gradual change in patients attitude over not 'seeing' the doctor, but being able to 'hear' the doctor over the 'phone. As I write it is Saturday mid-morning and we have already had five patients between us, the first call coming through from St Luke's at 4.45am today.

A two year old with one leg shorter than the other referred by one of our nursing colleagues, and she took a short video of the little girl walking, and also a photo of her arriving with her Daddy on his bicycle, complete with her mask. We are also so grateful to Swinfen Telemedicine Trust for their support. COVID will make this work even more important in the future.

**For many months praying for phone and internet communications to become faster and more efficient, but especially to work in times of emergency.** And since 24th March the internet connection has been totally revolutionised. The dispute over the site of the new tower in Hiranpur still goes on, no new developments or construction of underground cables - and yet faster internet than ever before. No explanation for this except divine intervention, and at just the time we needed it most.

And now with the way we are enjoying communicating with our patients and staff we pray this new freedom of communication will continue. In this time of lock down to be able to communicate is a lifeline.

# Patient Stories

## First delivery in SLH in 7 years

**We have been seeing Reena and Ibrahim since 2017. They were married in 2016 and Reena and her mother-in-law came to us one year later, because Reena had not conceived.**

But Ibrahim was working in Mumbai, and the couple had only been together for less than a month of their married life. We suggested to Reena and her mother-in-law that Reena go and stay in Mumbai with her husband. Reena looked so happy with this suggestion, but her mother-in-law was quite the reverse. So I asked when is Ibrahim coming home again - was due back in December 2018. "Come and see me together then" Elisabeth asked Reena, and she nodded and smiled. Duly the couple arrived in December 18, and Ibrahim said his Mum would take a bit of convincing, but he would ensure Reena joined him. Sure enough, when they came to see us at St Luke's in November 19 Reena was already 3-4 months pregnant - both of them so very, very happy.

Ibrahim returned to Mumbai, and Reena continued to come for monthly visits. Apart from being anaemic Reena was well, and her baby appeared to be growing well but on 13th February Reena came to OPD, very worried, since her baby had not moved since the morning, having been moving very well the night before.

Sister Susanna could not find the baby heart beat, and neither could we locate it with either the doppler machine or the CTG machine. Sadly a scan later on that day confirmed the baby had died, but baby was also lying in breech presentation.

This was Reena's first baby, and in India many private practitioners deliver such women by Caesarean section as inducing labour can be a long slow process, and relatives want everything done fast. We explained this to Reena and Ibrahim, explaining also that if they were prepared to be patient with us then we would give Reena all the pain relief she required.

It took three days to get the process of labour started, during which time Reena was at home with her family, coming to terms with her loss. And another four days she spent in St Luke's, being nursed round the clock. Premalata looked after Reena every night, coming to her at 6pm and staying until 7.30 in morning, and Susanna and Jyothi took turns during the day.

We delivered Reena of a beautiful daughter weighing 3 pounds and even though her baby was breech Reena managed to deliver the baby herself with just a little guidance from us - and no stitches. Also, though the baby had been dead for a week, there was little sign of maceration. So we wrapped her and Reena and Ibrahim had time with their baby together after she was born. Ibrahim also took lots of photographs, so that they will have something to look back on. This is the first time we have seen a couple here going through the trauma of stillbirth want to hold their baby. Culturally families feel they are protecting the parents by not allowing them to see the stillborn infant, and not even telling the mother that the baby has died. But through this experience, being honest with the parents, offering them their wishes, we see that parents are the same the world over, and it does indeed help their grieving to hold their baby and have memories of the baby.

Reena and Ibrahim are sad, but recovering well, and both are very grateful that Reena has not had to have any surgery. Although here in St Luke's for four days, she had her family around her continually and does not even recall having too much pain or discomfort.



First young patient (in blue t-shirt) to receive ether anaesthesia as day case in SLH in 7 years



James with his young patient from whom he had removed multiple maggots



Shubhro checking visual fields on a seven year old



Catherine calms a child with fever and rash

## Reena - another casualty of lockdown

**Reena had her thyroidectomy for a potential malignant nodule in her thyroid gland, and was asked to return 10 days later to have the skin staples removed.** But 10 days later the whole country was in lockdown. Reena went from one hospital to another, and eventually came to SLH on a Saturday morning 17 days after surgery.

The 33 small metal staples in her neck were becoming deeply embedded. Normally there is a staple remover that we use, and this is freely available in the Medical College Hospital where the operation had been done, but unheard of in the village around 30 miles from Hiranpur where this lady came from. Her son had brought her on his motor bike, and they had been stopped several times by the police, but when the police saw the cut throat stapled scar, they immediately let her go. Elisabeth got some dental and general surgical instruments, including bone cutters out of the theatre. It took over an hour to remove all the sutures, and this lady lay patiently on the bed sweating profusely enduring the sound of bone cutters snapping metal clips.

## Parweena

**After lockdown, some families separated. Parweena had gone to her parental home, which is something culturally acceptable in India, but only during pregnancy and after the baby is born.** But Parweena had been one of our infertility patients and we discovered she was hypothyroid.

Following thyroxine treatment she conceived, and was about 5 months through her pregnancy when she went to stay in her parental home. She had plenty medication to last her the month she intended to stay with her parents. But then lockdown changed all her plans - she was unable to get back to her husband. When her thyroxine tablets ran out, she went to the local primary health centre, and also to the nearby medicine shops, but none were stocking thyroxine. There are some essential medicines like thyroxine, which became unavailable from the medicine wholesale shops, almost within the first three days of lockdown. Anyway, for Parweena, we gave the medicine to her husband, together with a letter for the police (in case his motorcycle was stopped), to say he was carrying essential medicine for his wife, currently in the sixth month of her first pregnancy

# Prayer changes things!

## Prayer points and thanksgiving

**Please pray for the possibility of midwives joining us from the UK. We are not sure of God's intention to do this but our short visit from two midwives Karen and Jean made us wonder how things could be if we could have a steady flow of midwives from the UK**

**Our last Sunday school was on 14th March.**

Sadly these little ones have no alternative to Sundayschool. We are encouraging parents in Christian homes to have daily times together reading their Bible and singing hymns of praise and praying together. However, only a very few can read, and they are trying to stay as families in their own homes. Of course it is impossible to keep the children indoors - only one room for a family of six. So they play outside together by day, and come back inside when the sun sets around 6-7pm.



Happy at Sunday School

### StLuke's Sponsored children

Mary, Sooruj and Monica will be moving to the school run by the Sisters at Miriampahar.

All the children will be boarding, staying in the childrens hostel there.

In addition our friend, Sheena, has agreed to sponsor a younger child Reena who shall start at the English medium school in Miriampahar in class one - as soon as the school re-opens. Anna and Charlotte (who spent time with us this year) have expressed a desire to sponsor one of our staff children, Shilawanti.



Reena

## Captain Anil Massey

**Give thanks and pray for Captain Anil from Salvation Army, Kolkata** (who played a big role in the 90th Thanksgiving Service in December.)

Anil was one of the first people we knew who changed roles as soon as lockdown was declared in India. He saw an opportunity for Salvation Army to share the love of Christ to those who live on the streets of Kolkata and were dependent on the thousands passing daily to give them food.(see photo) Lockdown meant the once crowded streets were deserted.

Salvation Army makes fresh food on site, packs hundreds of food boxes daily and then distribute them to the poor, homeless, destitute on the streets of Kolkata



**Pray for friends and colleagues who have chosen to stay on in India - for those who consider India to be their true home**

Our dear Maltese missionary colleague Marcette  
Our friends Lindsay and Ranjan in rural Jharkhand near Bokaro, running a small maternity hospital

Thanking God that we are able to have WhatsApp calls and consultation with Marcette, Lindsay, PJH, Holy Cross Hospital and Hathimara Clinic, in addition to St Lukes.



**Visit from Anna and Charlotte**

Our two young students, presently taking a gap year before starting Medicine and Paramedical Sciences are both currently working in care homes - Anna with the elderly, and Charlotte with young people who have special needs. They had a difficult start to their time with us, both becoming unwell with gastroenteritis, but as soon as they recovered they made up for lost time, embracing the work, the people, enjoying going to an Indian wedding, and enjoying the stimulation of working alongside the doctors and nurses (much nearer their own age) in Prem Jyoti Hospital. Their lives are full on now, during the COVID epidemic, but in time they want to send a reflection of their time with us in St Luke's.

**Sheena visits us at St Luke's** - her second visit to us  
What a special treat it was to have Sheena with us for a 10 day "busmans holiday" in January  
Sheena fairly got around coming with us to see emergency cases at PJH, and on visits to outlying clinics with both Lis and Shubhro. And then Sheena gave us a special treat.....she took us to visit the Taj Mahal - achieving one of her dreams.

### BUILDING WORK

Thanks that numerous tractor loads of sand and stone have been delivered to the hospital regularly in the past 3 months. We needed cement continuously for building work in the Sisters Bungalow - walls which were falling down were broken and rebuilt, tilers, plumbers and electricians worked in tandem to make three new bathrooms and kitchens renovation of the Sisters Bungalow is complete, though not quite in time for Karen and Jeans visit - but that meant they could stay with us.

Give thank for the good practical interventions by Indian Government  
Lone tractors can be seen in the early morning climbing the hill out of Hiranpur on their way to the villages, laden with sacks of rice.