

German Specialists operate in the ASB Clinic in the Gambia

PD. Dr. Dr. Lei Li, head physician for oral and maxillofacial surgery as well as cosmetic surgery in Oldenburg, and his esteemed colleagues Dr. Jörg Knob and Dr. Dr. Joachim Siegert (oral and maxillofacial surgery/ cosmetic surgery in Gifhorn) returned to the ASB Clinic in the Gambia this year.

Between May 5th and May 11th, the medical team operated on 45 patients. 14 reconstructive surgeries were conducted on children with clefts, a congenital deformity often the root of children being demonised, forcing them to live their lives as outcasts of society. Ten patients suffered severe deformities caused by burns while six children had malformed hands, preventing them to use their fingers. The team also helped 7 patients with disfigurements caused by burns on elbow, upper arm and neck, awarding them greater independence.

In one case, the team loosened an ingrown tongue facilitating speech; two patients suffered from severe defects caused by an infection in the face, slowly disabling the eating process. In these cases, the team used transplants of the patients' own skin to reconstruct the face. Four patients were treated with facial tumours.

For patients of the ASB Gambia, this has been a fulfilling experience. Children have had facial reconstructions and limbs are moveable again. Without the medical team headed by Dr Li, these patients did not have the hope of improved quality of life, as these surgeries are not performed in the Gambia or its neighbouring countries.

The 'Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund' in Germany covered flight costs of the volunteering team who brought specialised instruments and medication to ensure the smooth-running of the surgeries. The ASB-Gambia financed 75% of this project, unfortunately no sponsors could be found for the rest. Among the costs incurred, were the services of the anaesthetist, medication, bandage materials, personnel, accommodation and overheads for the medical team.

Dr Li, Dr Knob and Dr Siegert spent 10-12 hours daily in the operating room to ensure that each patient could be helped during their short visit. It was the second time for Dr Li and Dr Siegert and the first time for Dr Knob in the Gambia, however all three are determined to return in January 2009 to perform follow-up surgeries on existing patients and any new patients.

It is the goal of the ASB-Gambia, that in future, all children with cleft lip and palate conditions will be treated within the first 18 months of their lives for free.