

Father and Son bond in Myanmar

Some fathers and sons bond at a basketball game, others prefer a game of chess.

Prof. Pinchas Nemet and his son, Dr. Arieh Nemet, opted for a more unconventional bonding activity. The two Israeli ophthalmologists joined a medical mission, organized by Australian physicians, to Myanmar. Although Myanmar, once known as Burma, gained its independence in the same year as Israel, 1948, there is little similarity between the countries. Prof. Nemet described it as stepping back in time; bumpy roads, vehicles that are non-existent elsewhere, poor communication and numerous electricity stoppages are only part of the problems of every day life. Contact with relatives abroad was impossible and messages were conveyed via the Israeli Embassy.

Among the entire population of 55 million citizens there are only about 100 ophthalmologists, most concentrated in the cities. This is problematic, considering that there are an estimated 600,000 blind people in need of operations.

The delegation went to one of the many villages dotting the country, a typical village with a few huts and no running water at the base of Mount Pupa. There they spent two weeks.

Each day the head Buddhist monk would drive to the surrounding villages and announce the arrival of the delegation. As a result, 60 villagers a day came to be examined.

The medical clinic consisted of two waiting rooms, where patients sat cross-legged on thin mattresses. In the other part of the building was an operating room with two beds, one simple and one appropriate for operations.

"We brought eye drops, contact lenses donated by an Israeli medical company and, after implementing Prof. Bloomental's mini knock method in surgeries, we left them discs detailing the operations," explained Nemet.

The delegation worked long hours.



The Nemets in action

Many of the people they saw suffered from glaucoma and advanced stages of cataract in both eyes. No one had had medical treatment and therefore their plights had worsened. Others were injured from branches, while working in the fields. As they had not been treated immediately this caused severe corneal opacity or shrunken eyes. Patients with droopy eyelids, advanced stage pterygium and tumors in the orbit or eyelid were also operated on.

In the last few days, the team examined the eyesight of the 6,000 students at the Buddhist monastery. They were amazed to discover 150 children in each classroom – all seated in absolute silence.

Overall, the journey has left a lasting impression on both father and son, who not only gave but also gained a great deal of knowledge about a fascinating people and culture. ■

On behalf of Dr. Yoram Blachar, Dr. Tzaki Siev-Ner, the IMA and all the physicians in Israel we would like to take this opportunity to thank the Australian chapter of the World Fellowship, the Australian Jewish Medical Federation, for their overwhelming generosity in this time of need. Dr. Ronald Sweet, President of the AJMF, has collected AUS. \$10,000. The funds will be used by the IMA to provide alternative housing and provisions for physicians from the north and camps for children of physicians who are on call around the clock.