

4G Nurse Visits Mongolia

I had the amazing opportunity in September to join a group of about thirty doctors and nurses to visit Mongolia. It was called —The Searching and Mending Weeks‡ and it has been an annual event for several years now. We went to screen the Mongolian children for congenital heart de- fects the first week and then to —mend‡ as many children as possible surgically and through car- diac catheter closure procedures the second week.

The —searching/screening‡ had already started when I arrived that first day at an old, large, run -down hospital in the largest city, Ulaan Bataar. It looked like an old Russian hospital and had very little equipment, other than what was sent by the relief organization, Samaritan’s Purse/ The Children’s Heart Project. As one of the doc- tors completed a cardiac echo, a quiet sadness filled the room. No interpreter was needed for this young mother to realize that her child was past the point of any surgical repair. To hold her as she held the very young child in her arms was an honor I will never forget. In the US this child would have been repaired within days of birth, as so many are, however, that was not an option there and we arrived too late for him. He passed away a few days later. The mother knew our doctors did everything they could to save him in that hospital.

In the town of Murun the next day, we again screened children. Several hundred came through the line that first day there and many required further screening with the echo. One girls’ cheeks and lips were a dark purple color and her fingers were already severely clubbed and purple. I had never seen this obvious a de- fect, even in my textbooks. As children with re- pairable defects were found, they were put in the registry of children who will be sent to the US for repair at various hospitals, including the Mayo Clinic. All of the

expense of travel for the child, their mother, and an interpreter will be covered by Samaritan's Purse. They also provide this life-saving surgery to children screened in Honduras, Uganda, and Kosovo. I have had the privilege of being the medical escort for several children. We screened a total of approximately 1500 children in two hospitals, outside dilapidated hospitals in villages, by the lakeside in a small restaurant, in a grandfather's —gerl (pronounced gare) in the open countryside,

and then in a most extraordinary place – the home of a nomadic reindeer herding family just south of Russia by Lake Huskval. It was called a —gertl (pronounced yert) but it looked just like a Native American teepee. It was bare limbs of tall trees for the frame covered with some sort of a canvas tarp. As my eyes adjusted to the dark interior of the —gertl, the Mom, who had invited a few of us into her home, laid her child on the dirt floor covered with various animal skins for us to listen to her child's heart for any problems. I never imagined I would be able to be a nurse in this beautiful setting right beside the lake surrounded by a herd of large reindeer in the most northern part of Mongolia.

The second week began with an early morning nursing conference for the Mongolian nurses at the hospital in Ulaan Bataar. Two infant, one child, and two adult manikins were given to the hospital's Nursing Director for training. We held lectures through interpreters and then —hands-onl sessions for them, mostly for airway management. Next year we plan to teach CPR with instruction cards in their own language. The rest of the week I was a nurse in the post- op ICU caring for children after the surgeries to correct their defects and for those children who were able to have —closure devicesl to repair ASD's and small PFO's in the cath lab. Every person, from the pediatric cardiac surgeon, the anesthesiologist, the pharmacist, the perfusion- ist, the nurses, and the OR staff

had a Mongolian staff member with them for training and to share information back and forth. We had lots of interpreters! The surgeon was able to repair ten children and we were able to do nine closure devices. Working with those precious children and their moms and the Mongolian nurses was very humbling and I was so honored to have this privilege.

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