



Burma Children

Medical Fund operating to give
Burma's kids a future

January - March

2015

BCMF Quarterly Report



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Overview

The first quarter of 2015 has been as busy as ever for the Burma Children Medical Fund (BCMF) with a series of exciting firsts taking place inside Burma. Patient intake is up from 95, in the last quarter of 2014, to 124, in the first quarter of 2015. This increase is reflective of the outreach initiatives that BCMF is implementing in Burma in an endeavor to reach patients earlier in their illnesses.

Burma has also seen many significant changes at the start of 2015. The upcoming election is sparking much debate, with many people still doubting the legitimacy of Burma's reforms. More INGOs and businesses are moving inside Burma and the country has also seen a significant increase in development aid. In January 2015, the World Bank pledged \$2 billion USD to Burma for development projects that include energy supply and health care, as was reported in The Guardian UK. However, the move was controversial and the Human Rights Watch issued a statement highlighting the present predicament of human rights in Burma. Issues of land confiscation, discrimination against ethnic minorities, access to justice and sectarian violence are still widely spread across the country, with little change seen on the ground.

Furthermore, [The Long Road to Recovery](#) was released in February this year. It is a report by the Health Information System Working Group (of which Mae Tao Clinic is a member) that sought, among other things, recognition on the parts of both governmental and international actors of the integral work that ethnic and community based health organisations have in serving marginalised populations in Burma. The report, which included a population-based survey covering nearly half a million people in Eastern Burma, highlighted that 70% of community members accessed ethnic and community-based health clinics when they were sick, whereas only 8.3% presented for care at a government health facility.

Burma has a population of over 50 million people; 77% of who live in rural areas. As such, BCMF recognises that it is important to establish a referral network with community based health facilities in the border regions to ensure that vulnerable peoples have access to vital health services. Even with an increase in international aid, if it is only directed towards government health services (which currently serve a limited sector of the community, largely in urban areas), this will fail to provide for the whole population, and marginalised communities will most likely continue to be neglected.

The First Quarterly Report of 2015 covers BCMF's program development in Burma focusing on access to Cardiac treatment and patient highlights for the quarter.

BCMF in Burma: Increasing Options for Cardiac Care

Since BCMF was established in 2006, BCMF has successfully helped 509 patients who suffer from various cardiac diseases. This represents approximately 36% of the total number of patients registered on the program over the years. In 2014, 64 new cardiac patients were enrolled onto the program. As BCMF increases options for accessing cardiac care for patients in Burma we have so far enrolled 49 new cardiac patients onto the program during the first quarter of 2015 - already more than 75% of the total cardiac patients referred in 2014! These statistics reflect a substantial need for cardiac surgery within Burma and mark BCMF's motivation for pursuing early-intervention and surgical missions inside the country.

Cardiostart International surgical mission in Yangon

Following BCMF's pilot outreach project in Burma during 2014, another trip was conducted in February, 2015 to expand upon and strengthen the referral network that had been established between International Surgical Missions (ISMs), health-related Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and charity hospitals in Burma.



Following these meetings, BCMF referred 19 patients for cardiac surgery with [Cardiostart International](#) (CI), an international surgical mission from the USA. CI performed surgery in Pin Lone Hospital as well as the Defense Service General Hospital, Yangon. However, after patients received a consultation with American and Burmese Doctors, only five adult patients were able to undergo surgery with the team. The necessary follow-up care in the Burmese hospital system is not in place even with the help of international surgeons. The fourteen patients who were unable to be treated were referred back to BCMF for surgery in Thailand.

If healthcare facilities are not able to provide appropriate follow-up care then patients will not be able to receive the treatment that they need. Based on this experience, BCMF decided that to increase the sustainability of a referral network inside Burma it is pertinent to develop the capacity of local staff, to improve the quality of care that care be provided. This will be achieved through skill-sharing initiatives with Thai and international doctors. This will help cardiologists in Burma improve their skills and develop the healthcare system inside Burma so patients can access the appropriate, pre, surgical and post-operative care that is necessary to ensure their treatment is a success.

Although health systems in Burma are still unable to provide for the majority of the population, by collaborating with ISMs, Burma is able to improve the capacity of local staff and provide higher quality of care for patients in need. By referring patients for surgery inside Burma, the benefits for patients are substantial. They include increased access to treatment earlier in their illness – saving them time and money – and allowing patients the comfort of undergoing surgery in their own country, where staff can speak their language, and they are able to have family and friends around them. It is BCMF's aim to advocate strongly for patients to access their rights and entitlements and help them overcome the fear that is so pervasive in the country following 50 years of military rule.

Echo-screening in Hpa-an

In March, BCMF coordinated a free echo screening to take place in Hpa-an. BCMF worked closely with Lampang Hospital's cardiac team, and the Ananda Myitta Clinic, to facilitate the screening. In total, 142 patients from Hpa-an and its surrounding townships, Mandalay and Yangon attended the event. Of those patients, approximately 50 had an echo-screening, while the remainder were prescribed medication and provided consultation for their conditions by the Lampang Hospital cardiac team.

Following the screening, 19 patients with congenital cardiac defects were referred to BCMF to assist with their further treatment. Of these, 8 patients are children under the age of 12 and they will be referred to Child's Dream, our partner organisation based in Chiang Mai to help them access further treatment. The remaining 11 patients are due to have surgery at Pin Lone Hospital in Yangon during an upcoming surgical mission with cardiologists from Thailand.



BCMF in the First Quarter of 2015

As for the total number of patients served so far in 2015, this quarter has been an important period for BCMF and saw a 23% increase in the number of patients enrolled on the program from the last period of 2014. There was an increase from 95 patients enrolled during the last quarter of 2014 to 124 patients enrolled in the first quarter of 2015. The most significant increase is seen in the cardiac patients enrolled, up from 8 to 49, this rise can be attributed to the free echo-screenings that have occurred so far in 2015 - in Mae Sot on the 21st February, and in Hpa-an on the 28th and 29th March. Furthermore, patients enrolled from Karen State, increased from 48 to 70, this is a result of the strong referral network that BCMF has been developing with Ananda Myitta Clinic in Hpa An, Karen State over the past few months, along with referrals from BCMF's established network in Thailand.

In looking forward to the rest of 2015, BCMF will continue to work towards increasing cross-border cooperation with partner organisations to improve access to treatment inside Burma. This will ensure that less people have to travel to Thailand in search of medical care, saving them time and money. Continuing with this approach, will allow us to decentralise our services and increase the community's ownership of their healthcare and thus make our program more sustainable.

Patients

The patient stories from this quarter highlight the many obstacles our young patients have to overcome having been born with cardiac disease in Burma. Treatment not only allows these young adults to achieve their dreams, but it also transforms the lives of their families. They are pertinent examples of the people in Burma that BCMF's outreach program is trying to reach.



Patient Spotlight: Zaw Linn

Zaw Lin, 15, arrived at BCMF suffering from Tetralogy of Fallot (TOF), a congenital heart disease that involves four abnormalities of the heart.

As a toddler Zaw Linn suffered seizures that caused his body to turn blue. The seizures sometimes occurring twice or three times a year continued until he started school. His family didn't take them to seek medical treatment until he was 9 and fell ill to hepatitis A. The family's monthly income of \$5 USD covers their food costs but leaves nothing for emergencies or healthcare.

It was during this clinic visit the family discovered that Zaw Linn suffered from a heart condition and was advised to undergo surgery. Due to the family's financial situation surgery was not a viable option. Zaw Linn learnt to adapt to his symptoms – difficulty breathing and fatigue – and his parents did their best to

manage his condition with medication.

In 2013, he lost the prescription from the doctor when moving from Rangoon to Kyondoe with his family. Unable to take his medication his condition deteriorated quickly and the symptoms flared up. Walking short distances caused him to feel weak and due to having low oxygen saturation his skin was a constant shade of blue. He was also in and out of clinics monthly for the following year with chest pain and fever. It also affected his self esteem and made him fear doing simple tasks, fearing it provoke another bout of illness.

A persistent ear infection forced Zaw Linn to seek treatment at a local free clinic. The attending medic detected a heart murmur and advised him to travel to Mae Tao clinic (MTC) on the Thai side of the Thai-Burma border - a common recommendation for patients who require cardiac treatment. Zaw Linn and his mother, with the assistance of a medic made the journey to MTC. MTC did not have the resources to assist him so he was referred to BCMF for further treatment.

Under BCMF's care, Zaw Linn was transferred to Chiang Mai where she stayed at the B.K.Kee patient House. After routine testing he was deemed ready for surgery. The surgery was a success! Within days he showed large improvements to his health, most notably, the cyanosis had seemingly disappeared and his skin had a healthy glow. In spite of the doctor telling them the chance of survival is 50% after the operation; Zaw Linn Htet says he was not scared or worried at all because he was very happy and grateful that he had the chance to get the surgery.



Zaw Linn said they had a very good experience at the patient house. His mother, so grateful for her son to receive treatment, took it upon herself to delegate chores around the patient house and help the patients who couldn't look after themselves. During the post operative interview his mother said *"Thank you very much for your support. We are so grateful for this. We are total strangers to you. You are so generous even though you do not know us. You have helped my family."*

Zaw Linn said that treatment has allowed his family to move forward. He now wants to focus his attention on working and paying off the debt his family have accrued searching for his treatment. He hopes that with hard work and discipline he will be able to achieve his dream of being a successful businessman.

Patient Spotlight: Pan Thu



Pan Thu, 15, was referred to BCMF for cardiac treatment. She has been diagnosed with an Atrial Septal Defect (ASD), most commonly referred to as a whole in the heart.

Pan Thu first began showing cardiac disease symptoms when she was 3 years old. Her mother noticed that Pan Thu became sweaty and experienced heart palpitations when playing. Her mother took her to a local private clinic and she was given paracetamol via an injection. The symptoms subsided but later flared up another two times over the next 4 years.

When Pan Thu was 7 years old her mother took her several clinics and hospitals hoping to correctly diagnose her daughter. Eventually a specialist diagnosed her with ASD.

Understanding the family's lack of finances, the doctor recommended medication rather than costly surgery to treat her condition. Pan Thu's mother is a single parent earning \$130 USD a month. Her income was barely enough to keep Pan Thu and her brother in school. The doctor advised her mother to put money away for the costly but necessary surgery she would eventually need. Between the ages of 7 – 15 Pan Thu didn't seek any treatment for her condition as she had learnt to deal with her symptoms.

A family friend heard about BCMF – an organisation assisting patients to receive cardiac surgery - in Pin Lone Hospital in Yangon in March 2015. Her mother made some enquires at the hospital and was told to take Pan Thu to the free echo screening happening at the end of March, in Hpa-An hosted by BCMF, cardiologists from Lampang Hospital and Ananda Myitta Clinic. The pair arrived at the Hpa-An for the screening and Pan Thu was referred to BCMF for further treatment that same day.

Pan Thu said her condition makes her overexerted and sweaty. She is unable to pick up heavy objects and suffers from chest and joint pain. In spite of these symptoms Pan Thu remains very positive and is very dedicated to her studies. She said; *'If I was given the option I would like to receive treatment after my exams, I am top of my class at school because I try very hard. I would love to study foreign languages at University and I hope that one day I might be able to find a job as a diplomat working overseas.'*

Please consider making a donation in support of Pan Thu's treatment and for others just like her, seeking good health and the realisation of their dreams.



**BCMF Program Statistics
January – March 2015**

	1st Quarter 2015	4th Quarter 2014
Total number of new cases across the program	124	95
Children- BCMF	52	65
Children- CDF	17	7
Adult- BAMF	33	8
Gynecological cases – BWMF	22	15
Diagnoses		
Cardiac Disease	49	8
Obstetric/Gynecological Condition	22	15
Gastrointestinal Condition	4	3
Eye Condition	0	2
Neurological Condition	5	8
Benign Growth/Benign Tumor	4	5
Congenital Musculoskeletal Deformity	19	10
Urological/Kidney Condition	4	0
Cancer	0	0
Severe Burns	0	1
Blood Disorder	1	1
Orthopedic	2	2
Wheelchair	14	40
Patient's home state/division		
Karen State	70	48
Tak Province	18	32
Bago Division	5	3
Mon State	8	4
Mandalay Division	1	0
Shan State	1	12
Ayeyarwady	3	0
Sagain	1	0
Yangon	6	0
Rakhine	1	0
Magway Division	6	0
Thailand Other	4	1