

Ian Jarvis blog 11-20-11

[A Bhopal Diary 12](#)

Sunday, 13 November 2011 04:32

This is the Blog for the twelfth week

You can still give a donation to support my trip and the BMA - see how on the '[Ian goes to Bhopal](#)' blog page.

That was then this is NOW. We are moving on.

Week 12 ??? Sunday 13th November; My Penultimate Week My penultimate Sunday and nothing to write! I can't review my time here because that is for next week and not a lot momentous is happening at the moment as I sit down to write.

There was an interesting coincidence today though. One of the documentary films was about the Manu National Park in Peru, not on last week's list as it was not a good film. This issue though is important and the film was about preserving that particular rainforest. My feeling about it was that we should not be making films about it. The film seemed to be inviting scientist in to study it and educating natives living there in my view both of these actions will lead to its destruction, not its preservation. The first because pharmaceutical companies will want to grab plants so they can make synthetic versions and the second since, as soon as they are educated, they will leave.

Today, still Sunday, I just happened to go to a news site, Wake up World, that was new to me and the first article was a video encounter between some people in a boat on one of the rivers through the park and some unknown natives an undiscovered tribe the article suggested. I felt this justified my view that we should keep the hell out of there. The forest has managed to look after itself for thousands of years with little interference.

And here's a question that the film raised, how do you make sure that the pet trade does not take too many macaws? My answer is simple, just stop them taking any! Not a view the film portrayed.

Oh, I have been busy yesterday and today though. The 'please volunteer' page on the BMA website and the Volunteer Guide here both need drastic rewriting, The website has lots of information not needed until you get here and the Guide has lots that you need before you get here! So I have spent some time rewriting both of them which, of course, will improve them enormously.

Monday and I found myself organised by Chandrakanta to help her clean the forecourt. Until you have to do that you cannot realise how much forecourt there is! The only thing that concerns me is the amount of water that was freely squirted over said forecourt. This is a place that is supposed to be environmentally concerned and collects rainwater collects it so we can spray it all over the front courtyard! There seems to be a lack of consistency here. The brushes we had to brush away the leaves, dirt etc were pretty inefficient too. I found myself thinking that a good stiff UKI type garden broom would do the job just as well, maybe better in fact. I wonder if such things are available in India. If someone from BMA is reading this then maybe you can slip one into your backpack/case next time you visit, there are plenty of handles available.

Earlier, at Chingari, I watched two little girls having an intense conversation in their own sign language, neither has speech not as you or I know it anyway!

We finally got some more soap nuts! We exhausted the supply well over a week ago and just about

every day I have been asking Nandu to get some more and every day he says 'Diwaker will go to the market'. And every next day I ask again. It takes a couple of days to soak the nuts before it is ready to use so a new batch needs starting before the last runs out. I have been adding water to the last batch and watching it get weaker and weaker and using more and more for my laundry. And each day nothing happens.

Yesterday I saw Diwaker and asked him direct - with the aid of Rahul (the chai-buying accountant) to translate - they are called areetha in Hindi. He went right out and got them from the market and there is a large bag sitting on the kitchen top.

Tuesday and I have just listened to a programme from last night on Radio 4 about the global financial problems. Everyone that was interviewed just kept saying the same sort of thing as before. Can they recognise that we need new thinking? We won't get out of this mess just by doing the same things in a different way and scaling up the problems. Someone was talking about creating a World Bank of last resort! Where does he think they will go when that fails? Calling interplanetary occupants!!!

This morning I had a chat with Sathyu about volunteers (you will recall I have rewritten the volunteer page for the website) and also about value. He said they try to not monetise the value of volunteers, in fact they try not to monetise anything but in practical terms, of course, they have to it costs money to run this place. So to him the value of a volunteer is not so much about cost effectiveness but more about human value and the long-term potential. A person who has been here will carry with them a new perspective, one that cannot be gained by any amount of reading or talking back home. A volunteer may go on to raise awareness and directly or indirectly much funding. And they may not they may just hold that awareness in themselves, but when they talk about it, it will be different.

This evening we had one of those incidents that is so silly. Four people arrived from Korea, three men and a woman. They are here for just a couple of days and then they move on. The woman is a cancer patient to one of them. The men were being put in with me and the woman in the female dormitory. When they discovered the women's dormitory was empty, they asked could they all share that, I, naturally, said of course. The guard was decidedly unsure about that! But I said, look, they are all grown up, they can decide for themselves what they want to do, where they want to sleep. No-one is in here for the next two days. He shrugged discontentedly and left.

I was showing two of them the kitchen and the guard's manager came into the kitchen with raised eyebrows. Would I talk with someone the rule is that men and women don't share the same dormitory and I cannot change the rules* - (from the phone). Fortunately one of those with me spoke good English and I gave him the phone. The end result is they are all in together.

The sensible solution; but why the angst? Why do we have to do this sort of thing? Rules are rarely always correct in every circumstance and we need to have the wisdom to know when to keep them and when to bend them and when to break them with conviction.

* And this was from someone who is about to break every rule in the transport of India laws and lie on the tracks to stop trains on the 27th anniversary day! And who has probably broken more laws in this country than most of us will even dream of. It's funny, isn't it, when it is OK to break someone else's rules but when someone else wants to break one of yours, suddenly it's different. (I hope the person reads this.)

(Grump over!)

This is me working with Sidesh with his mum, Mita, supporting. Mostly the mums sit in with the

children to support and be with them.

As you can see on the left, he has very bad club feet, the left is worse than the right. It is difficult to correct this problem but I read about the Ponsetti system which has helped to focus my work with him even though we are not likely to implement the plaster-casts that system uses. There are several others with the same problem, which is quite common here.

Wednesday morning and I meet my Korean friends again. They are here on behalf of Asia Ban Asbestos Network and attending a conference in Jaipur. They have taken a couple of days off to visit Bhopal, one of them has been before.

Not only is the electricity off this morning, but so is the wifi. (see next week's post!)

Wednesday and Thursday follow similar patterns. In the morning I go to Chingari and give between 5 and 10 children a treatment then return to Sambhavna to continue writing and talking.

One little boy, Sidesh (you can see him in the pictures), is severely disabled with frequent uncontrollable spasm and club feet, one worse than the other. I have given him several sessions but he is very nervous and gets frightened with loud noises and fast movements. Sanjay sometimes bangs a plastic ruler on the floor and this causes him to go into strong and uncontrollable spasm reaction. Sanjay saw this and said he had had enough treatment. By this time he was lying calmly so I said ??? look at him, he is quite calm now. It is your banging that frightens him.??? I sometimes get quite cross when adults are so thoughtless.

You can see me here, having sat this lad on a bench. He reaches his arms around my neck so he feels in control of himself and can steady himself and can start to stand. My arms are not actually doing anything other than being there to help balance and to catch him if he falls. I did not see the grin on his face as he found himself standing. The last picture is with his mum, showing her how to support him and do this at home. She took some encouraging not to hold him tight (Rashida helped). You can see, though, he is now as big as she is, so handling him is a real difficulty for her.

Another lad, a bit older suffers with weak legs and has difficulty standing. On Wednesday, after his session, I supported him from behind and we walked out of the room to a bench. Then I got him to put his hands around my neck and stand, with just as much help from me as needed. On Thursday, we did this again and he put his hand behind my neck and before I could do anything was standing! Almost with no help. And then I got him to pause for some seconds before sitting down. The next phase will be to go down slowly ??? this is the most difficult phase as it takes both strength and control. Tomorrow is my final day here so I will show his mother the exercise so they can do it at home.

Sanjay did have a joke with me first thing though. I was kneeling, waiting for my first child and he put his head around the door and said, ??? I have a new patient for you???. ??? Oh???, commented I, ??? that will be interesting what is the problem???. Then into the room came Rashida, one of the founders of Chingari, with a bad neck!

These two brothers have Muscular Dystrophy. This is by far more common in boys as it is a faulty X-chromosome and males have only one, girls have two and they both have to be faulty to have the disease. The muscles in these lads are so weak that they have to be carried everywhere and cannot sit without help and a chair.

As well as being weak the muscles can also be short and on the left. This one is on a machine that flexes and extends the leg. Personally, I don't like it as it has no sensitivity and also is too big for many of the children. I think I can do just as good a job if not better.

And my Korean friends left without washing their sheets ??? despite my having said it was their responsibility and them having sufficient time that morning and the power being on. Maybe it is something to do with national characteristics or social conditioning that even intelligent people don't THINK, especially about others. The previous night they had insisted on cooking a Korean chicken dish, despite Jayshree cooking for all six of us and there being only two gas rings and just assuming that everyone else would like that. More lessons in international relationships and community development! I remember, when I was a lad we had this little list of famous last words on our mirror in the passageway, one of them, which my mum had added in biro, read, 'I didn't think'. I think it was aimed at me! But maybe my sister will comment.)

And once again this is people who are campaigning against asbestos use in their country and also one of them is a consultant for environmental issues in his country. And yet they also carry around instant coffee in individually wrapped plastic packs (including powdered milk and sweetener) without making the connection. Can we claim to be green unless we green everything in our lives? (Including air-flights, he admitted openly.)

The top pictures show Sanjay (left) and Kalpana (right) working on children. I think there is another treatment table on order or at least planned as we are all working on the floor at the moment. Many of the floors in the centre are padded with thick foam under the (easy clean) vinyl.

Bottom left is Rani (left), the caretaker and Rashida Bee, co-founder, cooing over three of the babies. I think these three are healthy but have to come along with their mums and siblings for obvious reasons. On the right is a collection of the staff. Nicolas (volunteer) is left then Champa Devi, co-founder, the accountant, a mum, Poonam (occupational therapy) a couple of mums and Tarun, the manager, in red.

Friday, my last Friday, And it has been a pretty hectic one. I finished working on the new page for the BMA website this morning. And then I responded to comments on the Guide. In conversation with Sathyu he wants it to be a 'deeper' piece, outlining some of the basic philosophy of the Trustees in creating this place. I thought this needed to be on the website since potential volunteers need to know that from the beginning so that they may choose not to come if they are not in alignment with those ideals. Better for both sides not to have volunteers whose ideals are completely different.

Then off to Chingari where I find that Kalpana is off today as well as Deepesh who has been off all week. So that leaves just Sanjay and me on the physical side with Poonam doing occupational therapy. And Sanjay has hurt his back! So I did many treatment sessions today ??? I lost count.

Someone I haven't mentioned so far is Rani who is always there first cleaning along with the caretaker. Then she makes a saucepan of chai for us all and then she has the unenviable task of organising everyone in some sort of schedule into the various rooms for our treatments, speech therapy, education etc. And she helps all the children who come without parents to get in and out of the transport and move around the centre. She is probably the unsung hero of it all. I am grateful she has not been on holiday whilst I have been here.

It is easy to under-estimate the organising that goes on here. None of the families will have transport for carrying a disabled child or one with learning problems or hyper-active. If they have it, family transport is a motor cycle or scooter. So Chingari has five (I think) vans with seating and from before 10 onwards they are doing a constant round of coming and going. The roads around the bastis are often little more than tracks so speed is something unknown and, even then, they must take a battering. Loading and

unloading takes time of course.

The only time everyone is here is about 12:30 for when registration is done after which the early ones begin to leave. And all afternoon the vans and drivers reverse the exercise and take everyone home. Some organising that takes, and it always works.

THEN, in the afternoon, after a quick lunch as I arrived back here at about 13:40, the Friday Meeting. As it is my last Friday here I want to say a formal farewell to the staff. Apparently, I would be welcomed back!

It is interesting listening to the topics here. In UK you would not get a debate about the best way to keep public areas free of mosquitoes. I reported some weeks ago about the setting up of a Patient Committee with some of the doctors. They reported it is going well with some very positive views from the patients which, on one occasion reversed a decision (or at least a suggestion). I like that ??? listening to your clientele. The thought is that each basti or area could have a specific person from this group to hold expensive equipment, provided by Sambhavna, for general use in emergency. Can you imagine all the hoops that would involve in UK?

After the meeting someone (can???t remember who) was telling me that some mosquitoes are becoming immune to the current smoke type preventives used. Isn???t that just like nature? We get it under control and then it goes and wriggles out!

My final Saturday dawns, cool and bright as usual. No Chingari today. First thing was to catch up with Nagendra and review one of his web articles with him. Then I did go off to Chingari and whilst there I gave Sanjay a short treatment which improved his pain a little. Then back to Chingari, lunch, a treatment on Soni, out to see Samad and his knee, meet up with Nicolas to show him the whereabouts of the nearest supermarket and, finally, return to Sambhavna. A lot of walking with three treatments on adults, how unusual that feels!

This afternoon there was much noise in the meeting circle. For some time there have been many plans for the anniversary of the disaster. The 27th this year. Many of the staff here were affected directly by either the gas or water and themselves and their health has suffered as a result. But also many were not and some are not even from Bhopal. But still I detect an enthusiasm and purpose from everyone involved in this project, for project surely it is. There will be a drama acted out on the 2nd December with marches and today was banner making day. The drama rehearsal takes place each morning and I have promised to go and view it on Monday morning. Then, on 3rd there is a ???rail roko??? ??? ie groups of people from different parts of Bhopal will lie on the railway tracks and stop the trains. There will be plenty of announcements made about this ??? in fact a letter was given to the minister during a meeting last week, and he has promised to reply before the anniversary. If the reply is ???right??? the roko will be called off.

So, if you think there is an international campaign in progress and the local people are just sitting here and letting them, then I can say that is just so wrong. There is SO MUCH being done locally in Bhopal and further afield in greater India.