



We'd like your views – write to: The Editor, *Bone & Joint*³⁶⁰,
22 Buckingham Street, London WC2N 6ET or email editor360@boneandjoint.org.uk

Time to help the needy

Dear Sir,

I would welcome this opportunity, through the pages of *Bone & Joint*³⁶⁰, to notify your readers of the Bone & Joint Day, declared in India as the 4th August, in a grand function with the participation of Mr Gandhiselvan and Thiru P. Sadasivam, Judge, Supreme Court of India. The 4th August was the date, in 1971, that the Charter of the Indian Orthopaedic Association (IOA) was signed. Marking this first Bone & Joint Day, the Department of Posts, Government of India, issued a special postal cover with the caption “Stronger Bones, Stronger Nation”. A special postal cancellation bearing the logo of the IOA was also released by the Chief Postmaster General of India. The IOA had campaigned hard with the Government for a special Bone & Joint Day so that the activities of the numerous groups interested in the bone and joint health of the country might be brought into focus.

Disability and deformities created by accidents and bone and joint disorders are commonly seen among India's 1.2 billion population. Many patients have serious disability but are either unaware of the proper treatment or are unable to afford it. The IOA took upon itself to carry the benefit of modern advances and the latest techniques in orthopaedic surgery to the doorsteps of these people. Approximately 640 medical camps and public awareness activities were conducted across the country, where people were educated on the basics of bone and joint health and the preventative aspects of orthopaedics. Neglected orthopaedic problems in the poor and needy were identified and patients affected by these were offered free surgery.

The IOA has been hard at work with the underprivileged as further shown by the the ‘Let's Pledge to Give’ programme, where every IOA member was asked to operate on at least one deserving patient free of cost, a procedure that reflected the level of a surgeon's skill and expertise in their field. The saying of Winston Churchill, “We make a living out of what we

get, but make a life of what we give”, formed the basis of the programme. There was widespread enthusiasm for this concept and, to date, more than 5132 procedures have been performed free of charge. The operations varied widely and included complex spinal deformity procedures, the correction of neglected deformities, neglected nonunions and even revision joint replacements. This was all made possible by the waiving of charges by the hospitals, the free supply of drugs and implants from partnering companies, financial assistance from many charitable organisations and the complete waiving of fees by the surgeon and anaesthetist.

Even by a conservative estimate, the approximate total cost of this free surgery amounted to a staggering Rs.19.5 crores (US\$ 3,750,000). These operations were performed during the month of July 2012 leading up to Bone & Joint Day. This programme is quite probably unique and may have no parallel in the world. At a time when Governments throughout the world are talking of the ever-increasing costs of health-care, which for so many patients are unaffordable, this IOA initiative is remarkable. One free operation each year is unlikely to hurt any individual surgeon. It is a model that might be replicated in many developing countries, not just in India.

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Editor-in-Chief's comment: *So tell us what you think. At 360 we feel this is a truly impressive initiative from which we can all learn much. What about it? Have you tried the same in your country? If so, brilliant and please let us know. If not, why not try? Perhaps we should all give it a go and not just those of us working in the so-called developing countries. One free operation per surgeon per year seems a small sacrifice for the practitioner but a huge gain for the needy. Thank you, IOA, for leading the way.*