



## **MSF Diary (experience from the field) February 2010**

### **MY FIRST MISSION WITH MSF**

My name is Vasantha. Before I talk about my first journey with MSF, let me tell you to how I came to know about MSF. I started my international career by working with hospitals outside India and then got an opportunity to work with Merlin in Sri Lanka. That was my first introduction to “real” humanitarian work, although I had done lots of voluntary work in India but this was different in many ways. There I came to know about MSF and after my research about them; I felt fascinated and decided to apply to be working with MSF. I sent my application to MSF office in India and was invited to the assessment, which was a very elaborate and thorough screening process. After few weeks, I was informed that I have been accepted in the pool of volunteers. Then in a months’ time I was proposed my first mission.

When MSF called me and offered me a position in Suleymaniyah Burn centre at Kurdistan in Iraq I was thinking where is this place called Suleymaniyah is in Iraq? Surfing internet and found Suleymoniah in Kurdistan. I travelled from Chennai to Delhi to Suleymaniyah and with all the challenges; I reached my destination

just after 3 hours waiting at the Airport. **A Big thanks to MSF for making it easy.**

Before I give details about the programme I must bring the beauty of the Suleymaniyah city. It is a blessed city with natural beauty, everywhere mountains, streams, trees, blossom of roses, fruits and gardens. This might be the reason for it being the house of the earlier civilization in late 6<sup>th</sup> Millennium BC (Mesopotamian Civilization) in this part of the world. Amazing!

My mission started for duration of six months. I had doubts “what am I going to achieve within this short period, but still started with lots of questions in mind...

MSF has launched a programme in Sulaymaniah with a specific objective to provide care to burns and plastic surgery patients in Suleymoniah Burns and Plastic Centre in Suleymoniah, Iraq since there is a very high rate of Burn injury in this city. It is 56 bedded Hospital with burn and Plastic surgery unit. Infection in the burn patient is a leading cause of morbidity and mortality and remains

one of the most challenging concerns for the burn team. The development of infection depends on the presence of three conditions, a source of organisms; a mode of transmission; and the susceptibility of the patient. Infection risk for burn patients is different from other patients in several important respects. And my job was to train the staff, implementation and adherence of safety protocols and bring down the infection rate.

Based on my observation and available statistics, I started my work with an action plan. - A short term course on infection control was designed with pre and post theoretical evaluation and carried out for 80 Nurses in the Hospital. MSF issued a certificate after completion. We started surveillance of Health Care Associated Infections in two important Units – Adult Burn and Paediatric Burn units from 1 August 09 and completed on 31 October 09. I realized that it was my own worry that the time duration is short but we did make a humble beginning!

I must thank MSF for having given me this golden opportunity to work in Suleymaniyah with very good international working partners. Without their support it is impossible to achieve anything. It is amazing to see how different minds from different cultures and nationalities come together for a common cause. It is not always easy to arrive to consensus and comes with its own share of frustrations. But at the end of day, I feel it is worth to go through those challenging moments of discussions. Secondly I really must appreciate the local hospital employees for accepting me as one among them and following the guidelines set by MSF. I

see it has been a learning process. I gave some skills but I also, in return, learnt a lot!

**Conclusion:** The future is in our hands, we have to give our contribution to take care for human life beyond our borders. I would like to quote my favorite William James at the end ....

**“Our belief at the beginning of a doubtful undertaking is the one thing that ensures the successful outcome of our venture”.**



**VASANTHA Vadivel, Infection Control Specialist:** Mission in Suleymaniyah February 2010