



COURS MÉDICAUX DE RECYCLAGE POUR AFGHANS
MEDICAL REFRESHER COURSES FOR AFGHANS

RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY UNIT (RSU) PROJECT

History

The Reconstructive Surgery Unit (RSU), embodied in the Maiwand Hospital premises located in the center of Kabul, is a 30-bed Unit dedicated to reconstructive and plastic surgery. It's been operated non-stop by MRCA since early 1996.

In December 2007 MRCA started a new such unit, the BRSU (Burnt Reconstructive Surgery Unit) on the Regional Mazar-e Sharif Hospital campus (Balkh Province), a 20-bed capacity unit including five beds dedicated to severely burned patients.

The RSU treats patients coming from all parts of the country including the remote areas. Most of the disabilities treated are congenital disabilities (cleft lip, cleft palate, clubfoot, etc...), burn after-effects and neoplasms.

The RSU is the only teaching hospital habilitated for the training of plastic surgeons in the country, through a 3-year training curriculum. From its start, six surgeons, including two women, graduated from RSU and three more are presently getting trained in this specialty.

MRCA opens the Reconstructive Surgery Unit (RSU) in February 1996

The Maiwand Hospital is built in 1932, in the center of Kabul city. It becomes gradually a 350-bed teaching hospital linked with the Kabul University. In 1992, heavy maintenance work is handled and the hospital is in a good condition (water, electricity and bathrooms are operating), even if some equipment is outdated.

In January 1994, the hospital is located on the front line of the fighting between Afghans ravaging the Afghan capital since the fall of Najibullah's regime. The hospital staff, at the risk of their life, succeeds to evacuate most of the equipment but furniture. The hospital is relocated in a disused school in the northern part of the city and remained partly active.

In March 1995, the front line moves far enough from Maiwand Avenue to allow the hospital to come back into the previous premises. Buildings did not suffer very much, that is not the case for buildings opposite the street. But the hospital was systematically looted. There are no more furniture, mattresses, sheets, blankets, toilets, door lockers and taps, no more pipes and electrical cables as well. All windowpanes are broken due to bombing.

On June 14, 1995, agreement is signed between Professor Barakzai, Afghan Minister of Public Health and MRCA, allowing MRCA to take in charge the renovation of the premises, the re-equipment and the management of a Reconstructive Surgery Unit in the wing of the Maiwand Hospital where the former Plastic Surgery Unit was previously located.

Renovation starts in July and ends in November 1995, thanks to funding from French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE), Commission of European Union, MRCA own resources and other donors. Official

inauguration of MRCA-run 25-bed RSU takes place on 1 February 1996; the ceremony is filmed by the Afghan television.

RSU continues during Taliban era

During the first half of year 1996, RSU Project is run in a city under siege. Most of the Kabul inhabitants still present in the city, the poorest and the most vulnerable, survive thanks to humanitarian convoys that are allowed to cross the front lines. Taliban enter Kabul on 27 September 1996. They hang Dr. Najibullah, the former President, and issue several decrees mainly concerning women: ban from working (leading to the paralysis of the administration that employs many women, in particular widows), closure of girl schools, obligation of wearing tchadri, obligation to stay home unless accompanied by a male member of her family, etc.

For most of international Organizations and NGOs consequences of Taliban decrees are extensive. Many Projects are stopped or their activities are dramatically reduced. MRCA is facing a very difficult situation, as more than half of its staff is missing and as the majority of beneficiaries of the Project, women and children, cannot be treated any more.

Considering that support to the most vulnerable population, women and children, must continue whatever the difficulties would be, MRCA tries to find solutions for solving the issue. RSU is fully reorganized, based upon strict gender segregation for staff and patients. The first floor is dedicated to male patients and male staff, the second floor to children, women, and female staff. A wall is built at the entrance of the second floor. In November 1996, agreement is signed between MRCA and the Taliban Administration, allowing MRCA to pursue its activity with its entire staff, including female one.

Living situation is getting worse and worse during Taliban era

In 1998, there are about 700 000 people living in the capital city of Kabul, mainly those who could not escape to get refuge to the neighboring countries. They are facing total lack of the very basic livelihood and they are considered to be the most vulnerable group with no other options rather than remaining and suffering there. A considerable number of people living in Kabul are the internally displaced people mainly escaped from the fighting of the Northern provinces who fled from their village or were forced to leave, while all their properties were looted. The living situation in Kabul is very bad because there are quite no economics activities going on, and there is quite no chance of employment, especially for women who are banned of any activity out of their house.

In Kabul, there are only two complete functioning hospitals. They are accepting mainly the war injuries; the other medical problems are ignored. Disability becomes a very serious problem in the country. About 150 000 people, mostly male and mostly war related, has had amputation. But the majority of disabilities is not war induced but is congenital and accidental, especially burning. This category affects mostly women and children and is related to poverty. MRCA is the only NGO in Afghanistan, within RSU Project, that focuses on this fraction of the Afghan disabled population and provides training in that specific field.

Funding problems are faced during years 1998-1999

In August 1998, many NGOs and other humanitarian organizations, which are providing some social welfare to the displaced and poor population in Kabul, are forced to leave due to the hard policy of the Taliban regime against them. Their retrieval has a big impact on the live of the very poor people in Kabul, who are mainly depending on that humanitarian assistance. Having no expatriate staff in Kabul, MRCA decides to stay.

In 1998, the European Union makes the decision to freeze all funding dedicated to humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan, in order to force the Taliban regime to respect at least the most essential of human rights. All members States agree to adopt the same position. Donors advise MRCA that funding

for 1998 will not be paid. MRCA decides to reduce the activity of RSU to the minimum until the funding issue is solved. In June 1999, RSU activity is normal and 3 doctors (2 male, 1 female) are under training.

RSU Project comes within the scope of the reconstruction of the Afghan health system

In early 2002, the reconstruction of Afghanistan begins, following the fall of the Taliban regime, in November 2001. Many decisions are made in this regard at international community level, in particular as far as health system is concerned. MRCA re-opens discussions with Afghan Authorities, donors and others humanitarian actors, in order to find the most efficient ways to provide support within the scope of its activities, in particular within the RSU Project.

In May 2003, Mrs Chirac, the French First Lady, pays a visit to RSU with Afghan and French prominent figures, greeting MRCA for the support given to the Afghan disabled population.

At the end of 2004, the Maiwand Hospital is handed over to MoHE (Ministry of Higher Education). Agreement is signed in April 2005 between MRCA and MoHE, by which the management and the running of RSU is granted to MRCA, within the same premises. Moreover, it is specified that, once plastic surgery curriculum will be finalized, RSU will receive official recognition as Training Center in plastic surgery. Besides, the two RSU senior surgeons receive official agreement as plastic surgery trainers.

At fall 2005, significant renovation work is carried out in the operation theater and up-to-date medical equipment is purchased. MRCA is now in the process of reviewing its strategy for improving the services provided by RSU and for developing the scope of its future activities.

On December 2005, an operation technique is successfully used for the first time in Afghanistan

On December 17, 2005, a 30 year old patient is admitted in RSU, due to post traumatic heel skin and soft tissue defect. His injury was the result of a motorbike accident he had four years ago. Despite he was operated several times with the usage of skin graft technique, operations were not successful because he had skin defect in the heel. Therefore, he could not walk normally. On December 20, 2005, he is operated by the RSU surgeons, using for the first time in Afghanistan the following method: transfer of the planter flap with neurovascular pedicle. The donor side is covered with the full thickness skin graft. The healing is primary. Two months later, the patient can walk normally.

Since 1996 more than 18,000 patients received medical treatment

Since 1996, more than 18,000 patients – 66 % of them were women and children – attended the RSU for medical treatment, 8,000 patients were hospitalized and 9,000 operations – 45 % were children – were performed in plastic and reconstructive surgery.

At the end of year 2007 six surgeons (4 male, 2 female) have successfully completed the 3-year training course in reconstructive and plastic surgery. Three male surgeons are still under training. Besides, 11 surgeons received short term training in this specialty.

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