

UROLINK report on trip to Iraqi Kurdistan 10 September to 03 October 2005

The idea was that I would go with my nephew who is a 4th Year medical student in Sheffield I thought he might be quite useful as he was about 7 years in the Marines, but more important he is adventurous. But the Dean would not let him go he said it was too dangerous after consulting with the FO, he did not consult with me however.

I also tried to fly but 2 things foiled my plan:

1. The flights from Dubai could not be booked over the phone and you sit and wait for a flight to Erbil on Kurdistan Airways which goes twice a week without a guarantee you can get on. [I also heard when in Sulamaini that the planes are 20 plus year old crates so I am pleased].
2. I needed a visa and though I strove for this the Iraqi ambassador in London was almost impossible to contact and very dozy when I did. So I went by Turkey, Istanbul and Diyerbakir, on Sat 10th. The most impressive thing was I was charged only for 20 Kg excess baggage [Total 80 Kg] the sum of 160 pounds not bad and my luggage was sent through to Diyerbakir so no struggling across Istanbul airport. My feeling of euphoria rapidly faded 10 hours later when no luggage arrived, the luggage still in Istanbul I should have picked it up. So now 10pm no clothes, except the spares in my hand luggage. I was however rescued by a handsome Kurdish engineer traveling from London to Erbil, who trained in Cardiff. I would have traveled with him to Duhok the next day but I had to wait for my luggage Pity missed a good free lift there.

Luggage arrived thank to Zaki, the PDK man in the Diyerbakir, set off, the car obviously had a serious electrical fault and we ground to a halt every 20mins approx then restarted. There was one episode of road rage when a driver pulled out rapidly missed us by inches so my chap turned round and chased in hot pursuit, me saying 'Calm Down' which he did not understand at all, we were stopped by the Turkish army at a road block a short way back and he calmed down. The normal journey takes 4 hours, took 7. I changed taxis before the border. Fortunately the mobile phone has reached Kurdistan so I could phone Khaled [Prof Farhad's driver] to wait which he kindly did. Sailed through the Customs empty at 4pm.

Great welcome in Duhok but I had brought them another Lithocast especially for them as Erbil had never let the other one, I left last year, out of their sight. This one was given free by Wolf but I had to pay for the needles £450 pounds as they say they are disposable [Ha Ha] they have paid me for these in US\$.

Duhok 12 - 18 September

In all in 5 days we did 5 urethroplasties, all for hypospadias in various stages of redo, all over 10 years of age. We did a buccal mucosal graft [a first] on one.

A vaso- epididymostomy.

A pelvic kidney pyelolithotomy done by Dr Mohammed, the registrar.

Transurethral incision of prostate [TUIP]

Lithoclast of a bladder stone

We were unsuccessful with the attempted PNL as the C arm was not working properly and we had poor Xray screening so it was converted into an open pyelolithotomy.

Dr Shakir did much of the surgery but was very pleased to see his own new lithoclast working.

Abdominal mass biopsy under US [recurrence of testicular tumour] with help of the radiologist!!!! A first.

I was pleased to see my surgical skills were still present despite a lay off of one year but I specifically stated I was more interested in them doing the operating I would assist. I gave 1 lecture to the students on haematuria and one to the surgeons on incontinence and neuropathic bladder.

The problem with the X-Ray is that repairs for Phillips are done from Baghdad. I don't think we rate high on their agenda of problems Still I went to see the governor of Duhok, Mr. Tamer [cousin of Mohammed's] he appears to have American money so he will buy another C arm for us so there are always one working .

On Friday had a lovely day out with Mohammed and family we traveled to the mountains just south of the Turkish border. There is the Rosanna Hospital, built in memory of an American lass who was killed by Saddam Hussein, in the late 80's, the hospital was built by her mother, looked a good little hospital. We also went for a walk to a waterfall, I didn't make it, my flip-flops kept getting stuck in the mud. The rest of the country is as dry as a bone!!! Fun day ended up with a meal at Dr Mowfat's. Went to Sulaimany on 18th.

Sulaimany 18 - 23

I was met by Dr Aso and the registrars, Drs Hammad and Deyar. Stayed at Ashti hotel again this time proper showers !!!!, but in the top floor under the water tanks, Very noisy.

A time table of lectures [7!!] had been arranged for the urology team and the 6th year students, plus ward rounds and operating but as usual finishing at 2 pm this is good for me allows me to have my afternoon nap.

The mornings started at 8 am with the joint meeting, with all the surgeons, of previous days emergencies. Very useful and well done. An interesting case on Tuesday a 'terrorist' had tried to commit suicide by slashing his wrists and penis off, it was held on by some skin and dartos muscle. The injury was 2 hours old when it arrived but they didn't think to or didn't know how to sew it on again which I would have done, if they had phoned me in the hotel. Nothing to lose. The fact he was a terrorist made then totally unsympathetic to his plight. I wanted to know how they knew he was a terrorist. The theatres and wards are in the teaching hospital now which is roomier, cleaner. I asked about the video stack which I said was a must for teaching last time and they have not been using but there was one so we wheeled it out and it worked well It has been there for a few months!! In all operations done; 2 cystocopies

TUR bladder tumour some difficulty stopping the bleeding as the fluid ran in so slowly with a fine giving set only available. The equipment was otherwise working. My gift of new loops [second hand after I use, these are single use now in the UK] donated by Storz was well received.

Basketing and ureteroscopy done by Dr Deyar, his first with me watching on the video stack

Endoscopic incision of urethral stricture and TUR/biopsy of lesion in prostatic urethra.

I gave 4 lectures to the final year students alone, covered most of urology as revision for finals. Gratefully **received**, they are bright and very enthusiastic. Three more to the urology department on Endourology, Erectile dysfunction, radical prostatectomy and substitution cystoplasty.

Dr Kallender, general surgeon kindly took me out to his nearly completed house and to see his family. He is in his early 50s and this is the first house he has owned always rented amazing. Fantastic house 4 floors with chandeliers, mosaic tiling must have cost a bomb. The cost of living has escalated in Sulaimany due to the large influx of Iraqis both Arabs and Kurds from the south. They wait in mile long queues for petrol and yet the crude is just under the ground [it goes to Turkey for refining].

Erbil 23 - 28 September

Staying at the newly refurbished Sheriton, thanks to the Minister of Health very pleasant and very first class. I was met by Dr Araz, orthopaedic surgeon recently returned from Sweden and in view of my interest in refugee doctors for the Edinburgh collage gave me some good insight into Swedish policy, which we do not hear about just our own, they appear fairly ruthless First day I did a teaching ward round and organised operating for the next few days.

Operations done:

Clam cystoplasty for a 12 year old boy with neuropathic bladder

Rectus fascial sling for an incontinent middle aged lady

both these operations were a first for the 2 surgeons so I was pleased to assist them

Also 2 optical urethrotomies one difficult for young man who had a buccal mucosal graft in Mosul [I think] but they had failed to cover the membranous urethra; stricture area fully

I saw a young lady who needs a vaginoplasty for vaginal atresia, but I saw her too late to do the surgery she was very beautiful and was impressed her husband was sticking by her in a country which does not really appreciate women can have congenital abnormalities of their reproductive organs. She has had inadequate surgery in the form of split skin grafts in Iran but can not afford more surgery there. I will consider doing this in May when I return.

I gave 2 lectures on Incontinence / Neuropathic bladder and Erectile Dysfunction.

Dr Pishtewen, the senior urologist, returned on the last day from USA, lovely to see him. He recently had a serious car accident one of the occupants, an anesthetist, had been killed driving is dangerous as they drive very fast, although the roads have improved and been re-tarmaced they are single track and overtaking on the switchback roads is a nightmare

Dinner on the last evening with the Minister of Health, Dr Jamal, he gave me a picture for my birthday last year remember, and Dr Mohammed Suhaib , Drs Green Eyes and Good Friday was great. There was a Kurdish cardiothoracic surgeon from Germany there. He comes back to help teaching and with equipment this is great for the morale of the local surgeons.

Travel back to Duhok on the afternoon of 29th. The countryside still beautiful, rugged, is bone dry I am interested to note there are prayer rooms at the garages not surprised the speed they drive, must feel it an

insurance against crashing. The cost of petrol is ridiculous, 2p a litre surely some mistake, have I heard correct. Much cheaper than in Turkey so the taxi drivers are happy to come over the border even with the hassle to get this nearly free petrol.

The urethroplasties are all doing well except the buccal mucosal graft which is infected and partially sloughed. The free graft needs recovering if they can get it clean.

Final days operating at the emergency hospital to do PNL there are 2 to do. This hospital has a working C arm, but has no piped compressed air, slightly dodgy table but Dr Shakir was great. He got in, cracked the stone with the lithoclast and cleared about 75% of the stone, the rest can be finished off with the ESWL. There was only time to do one as the fiddling around at the beginning to get the equipment working took for ever.



Had a lovely farewell lunch with all the urologists and 2 registrars plus Dr Abdulla who is DG of the Dept of Health in Duhok, he has access to the purse strings and therefore is important. Whilst at lunch the Ministers driver came from Erbil with present of a rug [very nice] and a framed certificate which has my name on and also these words. *'We highly appreciate your efforts, traveling thousands of miles to treat our patients and to update our urologists with the advanced and up-to-date knowledge and skills. Your contribution to our health service is very valuable'*. Now that is what I call wonderful, most touched. So my almost within weight luggage now made heavy again but no worries. Left the following morning said goodbye to Dr Farhad and Mohammed. I am trying to get him with Dr Shakir to join BAUS.

Slight delay at Kurdish side of the border finding a taxi and getting through the press of people. Friday as a holiday appears to be the day to travel. No trouble with the Turkish army in fact bags not opened. Flight from Diyerbakir fine, wait in Istanbul airport with 2 Kurds, one from Bury the other Finland from 1 to 7 am. Arrive in Manchester met by Ruth with Hector[dog] and car, go straight up to Edinburgh, [council weekend] by car as no public transport on Saturday morning what an appalling service.

Epilogue

I wasn't quite sure when I was going if I needed to go. I am pleased I did this was a very worthwhile visit and I intend to return next spring to hopefully help run a urology section of a conference and examine as well

Advice

I feel there is no communication between the urologists in the 3 medical schools. They could do to form a Kurdistan Urological society to meet for 24 hour twice a year for presentations and difficult case discussions. The registrars should be affiliated as well. When I went to Wales [pop. 3 million] in 1987 there were 14 urologists and we met thus, these meetings were enjoyable and instructive. Not only is there no communication there is positive dislike between the departments in the 3 cities, in fact they all think they are the best. I must admit they have very good surgeons, good at different things but all are way behind still in Endo-urology. They still need to send their urologists especially the younger consultants and trainees for courses

They need to learn laparoscopy, Percutaneous nephrolithotomy/Endourology, Complex urethral surgery, Reconstructive bladder surgery, and surgery for erectile dysfunction. There is also a great need for Audit and more especially the urological injuries associated with gynecological surgery need to be audited. As these injuries are commonplace re-education may be needed or routine preoperative endoscopic stenting of ureters or preservation of the cervix at hysterectomy

Thanks to:

All the urologists in N. Iraq for their kindness and enthusiasm. In no special order Dr Shakir, Dr Mowfat the new urologist from Mosul, Dr Mohammed Suhaib, Dr 'Green Eyes' Yousef, Dr Hassan 'Good Friday', and Dr Pishetewen in Erbil amongst the others Dr Aso and Ishmael and the very enthusiastic young man who, name has escaped me but he knows who he is and all the other urologists and registrars in Sulaimany

Minister of Health Dr Jamal

Dr Abdulla Saeed Abdulla DG DOH Duhok

Professor Farhad of the Medical School in Duhok

Dr Araz `for looking after me in Erbil

Dr Kallender for the same in Sulaimany

Khaled 'Prof Fahrad's driver'

And most of all Mohammed Seido and his family for looking after me and making me feel at home in Duhok, Also lending me a mobile so I was in contact with home.

Wolf for providing the Lithoclast free except for the needles

Storz for the large number of loops which were in good working order, now these are so called single use in UK.

SHEIK who I am asking to pay for the excess baggage
EBME at Glan Clwyd Hospital for mending the Lithoclast
UROLINK {BAUS} for their support. They paid towards my ticket at least they did last
year. Also I took a new 8F ureteroscope Storz which I received from Ru MacDonagh
Mr and Mrs Maurice Buckley for the money raised for Urolink and the children's clothes I
took to Kurdistan.
All the people of Llanarmon –Yn –Ial and District who support my fund raising events for
UROLINK.

Costs

Return Air ticket - Diyarbakir £490

Excess baggage to £168.00

From £50 00, Hopefully from SHEIK

Hotel Diyarbakir paid for by CME £60.00

Needles for Lithoclast paid for by me reimbursed by University of Duhok [Vat exemption]
£479.00

Taxis x2 Diyarbakir to and from the Turkish border, \$120 x 2 =£ 168.00 paid for CME

All other expenses including hotel/laundry/food - paid for by the universities of Duhok,
Erbil and Sulaimany for which I am truly grateful.

Final thoughts

Next time I fly from Frankfurt on Kurdistan Airways now running to Erbil but someone
must tell me in good time if I need a Visa.

The worst thing that happened was the loss of my brand new Ipod with 4 hours of music,
an eclectic mix, put on by Ruth as a present, Blur next to Kathleen Ferrier.

The best things were Dr Shakir doing his first PNL and seeing Dr Pishtewen looking so
well and the wonderful letter of appreciation from the Minister Dr Jamal, which I will
treasure all my life.

Distributed to UROLINK

SHEIK

Each of the University Urology Departments

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