

Bangladesh: Tackling Health Issues and Implementing Social Business

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Chair, Board of Governors

In June 2010, the Coalition for Global Hearing Health meeting was held at Academy headquarters, organized by James E. Saunders, MD, and Jackie Clark, PhD. During the meeting, 27 countries that have significant healthcare concerns were represented. Samantha Caccamo, founder of Social Business Earth (SBE), presented issues about Bangladesh. She planned to go there for two weeks, and solicited my participation.

Our visit to this incredible country in November 2010 was too short, but productive. The country is roughly the size of Iowa with more than 160 million inhabitants and an infrastructure that cannot support the population. We met with members of the health department; Professor Pran Gopal Datta, an otolaryngologist who is vice chancellor of Bangladesh's only medical university; Professor M. Nurul Amin, who started the Society for Assistance to Hearing Impaired Children (SAHIC), the only ear hospital in the city; and Professor Muhammad Yunus, Nobel Peace Laureate, founder of the Grameen Bank, and originator of the concept of Social Business (SB).

SBs are organizations designed to solve a pressing need such as poverty, agriculture, technology, or health. Each organization must be financially self-sustaining and is allowed to make a profit, with the caveat that the profit is re-invested to expand the reach of the SB. The only profit a founder or investor may reap — perhaps the most important — is the profit gained by the heart, knowing that you are involved in selfless pursuits.

Several SBs are already in place, such as the Grameen Eye Hospital, which serves the rural poor and provides inexpensive cataract surgery, and Grameen Danone, where the CEO of Dannon Yogurt and Professor Yunus collectively serve the poor and malnourished. They produce Shokti Doi, a yogurt fortified with iron, calcium, and other nutrients, which sells for seven “taka,” or about 10



Samantha Caccamo, Nobel Laureate Professor Yunus, and Michael D. Seidman, MD, at Yunus Center.

cents. If children consume two servings a week for eight months, the nutrients mitigate malnutrition.

The hearing issues are staggering — more than 11 million people in Bangladesh are deaf. The World Health Organization (WHO) suggests that 80 percent is acquired and 50 percent is preventable through proper immunizations,

education, and early intervention. Preventing these problems would save billions in lost productivity, not to mention the huge emotional and psychological toll this situation has on the affected person and their families. Most with sensorineural hearing loss (SNHL) receive no education, are relegated to their homes, and become ostracized and

Peter J. Koltai, MD, elected to leadership position

Peter J. Koltai, MD, chief of Pediatric Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery at Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA, has been elected to serve for the next two years as vice president of the medical staff at the Lucile Packard Children's Hospital at Stanford. He will then become president for the following two years.

Dr. Koltai is president of the American Society of Pediatric Otolaryngology (ASPO) and former president of the American Broncho-Esophagological Association (ABEA). For the Academy, he is immediate past chair of the International Otolaryngology committee, and in 2009 received the Academy's Distinguished Service Award.



Goats and a rickshaw outside the Pacific Hotel in Bangladesh.



Dr. Seidman (right) visits Grameen Danone, where the CEO of Dannon Yogurt and Professor Yunus collectively serve the poor and malnourished with Shokti Doi, a yogurt fortified with iron, calcium, and other nutrients.



Children learn at this school for the deaf started by Professor Amin.



This boy had bilateral implants in Singapore and is being rehabilitated at Professor Amin's hospital.

