

Eight Successful Surgeries in Three Days

George Subraj, Long Island Jewish Team Complete Another Medical First in Guyana

By Richard B. Mahase

ON SUNDAY, April 11, when most of the West Indian community of Queens, New York was enjoying the warmth and wonder of a day of sunshine; miles away in Georgetown, Guyana, another Caribbean New Yorker, was looking at the faces of patients and their families and seeing the darkness and desperation in their lives, which to say the least, was more depressing and deadly than the harshest of storm.

But in his presence and eyes they discovered the mesmeric light of hope. Once again he stood like God's sentinel on the door-

grandmother of one of the very young patients came up to him, held his hand and said "God bless you Mr. George Subraj." But if George was the talis-

sprint to imminent demise.

UP IN THE AIR

However, Dr. Stephens was going to be their new coach at the starting line. It was his dream to fulfill their dreams for a healthier, longer, rewarding life and dreamed only to realize this no matter how long it took. And it took more than a year! But when the heart is pure and the intent is righteous the master planner steps in to endorse it.

And he did so up in the air on a flight bound for the rice and sugar producing country. George Subraj, President of Zara Realty Holding Corporation was heading for Guyana to formally hand over a huge computer training centre which he had donated to the Saraswati Vidyaniketan School, WCD, when he met Dr. Stephens mid-

from the NSLIJ and aware of their exhaustive talent pool and professionalism, concluded his aerial meeting with Dr. Stephens with a commitment for a quick follow-up as lives was at stake.

While the health sector in Guyana has expanded and progressed, presenting new vistas of crucial care services; there are, understandably, cases because of severity and time constraints that need overseas attention. In situations like this when the patient finds it difficult to fund the procedure abroad an animated appeal machinery is set in motion to defray costs.

The government steps in and offers a generous \$5000 (US) for each case. This has been ongoing for a number of years, even soliciting the diasporas assistance. But with the number of cases increasing and the amount mounting some



Dr. Gary Stephens and George Subraj

virtuous ideals, in 2008, George thought 'enough was enough' when a flyer was sent to him for another donation for a youth with

for assistance on behalf of the sick boy merely brushed him aside. This strengthened his conviction that it was neces-

about personally to source specialists capable of performing such a procedure and is prepared to travel. And in the state's capital, Washington, DC, he found such a team.

At his invitation a brilliant team from Walter Reed Medical Centre travelled to Guyana and performed the first kidney transplant surgery there with George standing a few feet away sharing words of comfort to the relatives of the patient. He had miraculously opened the door of hope for patients with chronic renal condition, even finding the time to selflessly overlook every single detail for the team's comfort and success and the patient's happiness.

This invaluable linkage of George is now assisting other patients with similar condition.

C.H.I.

Preceding this, however, Dr. Stephens had also set up an institution of hope for adults with life-threatening cardiac conditions. With great expectations the Caribbean Heart Institute was realized and soon enough the visionary surgeon had performed the first heart bypass surgery. This was a well documented success. The country's health care had taken a giant stride for its citizens.

For the past decade, however, the Kids First Fund, headed by the former First Lady of Guyana, Varshnie Singh, and with the support of a number of institutions and individuals alleviated the plight of many children with interventions done in neighboring Trinidad and Tobago to as far as India. Her concern, unheard of that time for those in critical condition became a source of national pride, but most importantly to the ill and needy she had given them a door to knock on. Here it was also the bill was astronomical as she tried to take as many ill children per trip as she could fi-



George Subraj and Dr. Sheel Vatsia

months ago Dr. Vatsia completed the screening and evaluation of the potential patients.

Putting together the team at a time free and convenient to all was agreed on next. Following this, a list of fourteen professionals with decades of experience travelling to other countries and

performing similar surgery, while maintaining their full-time work commitment in the states was drawn up.

Spring break of 2010 was the scheduled date of departure and that's when the list of visitors' and patients were handed over to George. It was his task to get the team there on time in their tight schedule and back without any inconveniences: the team consisted of Joanne Mora (Cardiologist), Shubhika Srivastava (Cardiologist), Sheel Vatsia (Surgeon), Jeanine Lutgen (Assistant Surgeon), Robert Stroud (Perfusionist/Heart Lung Machine), Trace Baker (Perfusionist/Heart lung machine), Tatyana Rozenthal (Anesthesiologist), Ingrid Hollinger (Anesthesiologist), Marietta Africano Sabido (Intensive Care Nurse),

Colsie Elaine Myrie (Intensive Care Nurse), Marlene Kuanken Juanico (Intensive Care Nurse), Margie Enriquez Lutian (Intensive Care Nurse), and Maureen Fitzpatrick Gilroy (OR Scrub Tech) and Dr. Gary Stephens.

George and his friend Lake Persaud was left to co-ordinate the assignment. It is here that special mention must be made of Lake Persaud. The Esteé Lauder engineer, singer and broadcaster has grown in stature over the years co-ordinating similar teams in educational, cultural

and religious pursuits in Guyana and the US. On this stage again, with constant interaction between George and Medical Team Leader Dr. Stephens, he had once more skillfully, organized the entire package; from Caribbean Airlines flights to the comfort and ambience of the The

Pegasus and The Princess Int. Lake Persaud had excelled once more!

EIGHT SURGERIES

Upon the team's arrival in Guyana on Friday, April 9, last they spent the following two days further evaluating the young patients and on Sunday, April 11, a total of four successful surgeries were completed: The third procedure were 11-year-old Nirvanie Browne, one-year-old Keandra

Daniels and 11-year-old Shadel Griffith and nine-year-old Bharat Narine!

The first case was a pulmonary stenosis, where there was a severe obstruction to the heart's attempt to pump blood to the lungs. And then a Tetralogy procedure, a very complex operation, was undertaken where there was a combination of a hole in the heart with obstructed blood flow. The third procedure undertaken was to address an atrial septal defect, which was

characterized by a large hole between the left and right chambers of the heart.

Speaking after the third surgery Dr. Vatsia said, "the team is surgically correcting a number of heart defects, and the range of defects is fairly diverse. Most of them will result in early or premature death of the child or individual if not fixed in a timely manner," he pointed out.

"Many of these children ideally should have had their operative procedures done years ago, and that itself can give rise to a more technically challenging recovery and somewhat of a higher risk

CONT'D ON PG 59



FROM RIGHT TO LEFT: Tony Subraj, Lake Persaud (Team Coordinator), Colsie Elaine Myrie (Intensive Care Nurse), Ingrid Hollinger (Anesthesiologist), George Subraj (Grand Sponsor), Gloria Subraj, Jasmine Subraj, Shubhika Srivastava (Cardiologist), Trace Baker (Perfusionist/Heart lung machine), Komal Srivastava, Jeanine Lutgen (Assistant Surgeon), Maureen Fitzpatrick Gilroy (OR Scrub Tech), Dr. Sheel Vatsia (Surgeon) and Jas Persaud.

step of life and death. On one hand the plight of patients and on the other, the team of medical professionals who had accepted an invitation to lead them out of the valley of hopelessness. He was the miracle messenger they were waiting for.

The mascot of medical firsts in the small, vibrant South American country.

Then an elderly

man of the country it was Dr. Gary Stephens whose vision it was to introduce this technically sensitive specialty of pediatric surgery to Guyana. It is where the youngest members of the community, frail and fearful, are stricken with illnesses that will bring even the strongest to their knees.

Without the finance and expertise of capable professionals at their disposal, life's challenge for these children with shaky, uncertain first steps was like a

air, mid last year.

With the clouds rushing by the Chief Executive Officer of the history-making Caribbean Heart Institute (CHI), Dr. Gary Stephens, expressed his desire to introduce pediatric heart surgery in Guyana in collaboration with a proficient team from one of the premier health care institutions in New York; North Shore-Long Island Jewish Medical Centre (NSLIJ), New Hyde Park.

George, also closely associated with several personnel

of the more generous donors no matter how noble the cause, found it a fiscal dilemma and gradually faded.

George Subraj, himself a consistent, munificent donor, even ascending to the position as Vice-President of Guyana Watch, travelling back and forth many times a year since 1992 to assist the less fortunate, never failed in his pledge to hold the hands of the suffering.

While still passionately embracing Guyana Watch and its

renal failure. The sum required was large and the distance for surgery far away. Of critical importance too the lad had only three months to live. So rather than having the patient in limbo—a shortened life-span and an uncertain fiscal position, George thought why not have the doctors travel to the patient in Guyana.

His deliberation was fortified by the fact that he was willing to fund the entire trip, as some of the persons he had approached

and very urgent that Guyanese who are ill be given another alternative than having to find an unimaginable sum in their sick, desperate state. If only he could find such a team of doctors, who were also willing to give of their time and travel to another country it will assist not only this youth, Munesh Mangal, but others also.

With Guyana and the wellbeing of all Guyanese always close to his heart he set

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