

## New plastic surgeon has altruistic bent



*Gold Coast based plastic surgeon Dr Dilip Gahankari (r) and Darwin plastic surgeon Dr Ravi Mahajami (l) operate on an East Timorese patient recently in Darwin. Dr Mahajami is a second generation surgeon in Darwin, his father having practiced there for 40 years.*

Plastic surgeon Dilip Gahankari has been to Darwin twice in recent weeks to operate on wounded people flown in from the recent troubles in East Timor.

Dr Gahankari, who is taking rooms in Lismore and will offer services through St Vincent's Hospital, was invited there by his friend and colleague Dr Ravi Mahajami.

On the first trip, three of the five patients requiring plastic surgery needed complex orthopaedic reconstruction to repair bone damaged by gunshots and were transferred. Two of the cases were dealt with in Darwin and were operated on by Dr Mahajami and Dr Gahankari.

One patient had a bullet injury just above the knee. The bullet had destroyed 75% of a major nerve of his thigh and his lower limb was completely paralysed below the knee. Using microscopic surgery the surgeons explored and cleaned out the nerve, followed by nerve grafting and reconstruction. Nerve recovery takes from six months to two years and the young East Timorese man will hopefully regain good function.

The second case had a wound to his left arm with an injury to the radial nerve. They did tendon transfers to provide him with better function in his wrist until the nerve recovers.

Dr Gahankari regularly volunteers his surgical skills with the Australian overseas missions in less privileged countries like East Timor and India. He is one half of an energetic Indian couple who have made Australia their home. He and his wife, Jyoti, a medical researcher, have settled on the Gold Coast. Mrs Gahankari is currently finishing her PhD in breast cancer biology at the Queensland Institute of Medical Research.

Dr Gahankari visits India every year where he sees his family and does volunteer work. He has a strong group of friends who are involved in health related community work in remote areas – almost since the time they did their primary medical degrees.

“They are still there. I was the odd one out leaving. I would like to give something back to my friends and my area.

“There are lots of plastic surgeons in India but people can't get to them or can't afford them. It is good work and gratifying. It brings me back to ground level – you tend to lose the sight of your past and I don't want to do that.”

Dr Gahankari comes from a humble background in India. He is from Chandrapur, a small city about 1000 kilometres from Mumbai. He was always interested in medicine and came in the top 25 in the state of Maharashtra (pop. 100 million) in his final school exams, thus earning a place at medical school in Nagpur where he graduated in 1984 and in general surgery in 1987.

By 1993, Dr Gahankari had completed his plastic surgery residency at the University of Bombay. At this stage he had also met his wife to be while he was demonstrating skin grafts on rats to a group of researchers at a Bombay hospital. She loves Australia he says. “She enjoys it to the last bone in her body,” he laughs. “She is a very people person.”

Dr Gahankari undertook advanced plastic surgery training at the Canniesburn and Glasgow Royal Infirmary hospitals in Scotland and received the FRCS fellowship in general surgery in 1999. He was then invited to join the Princess Alexandra Hospital in Brisbane as a hand surgery fellow and following that, underwent further training as a head and neck and burns fellow at the Royal Brisbane Hospital. In 2003, he was awarded the FRACS in plastic surgery.

He is a VMO at the Gold Coast and Royal Brisbane hospitals and has a private practice at Benowa, which he established in February 2004. He teaches undergraduate medical students at the University of Queensland and has published extensively in academic journals of international repute.

Dr Gahankari is currently organising consulting rooms in Lismore. In the interim, appointments can be made on ph (07) 5539 4611 or fax (07) 5539 6199.