New Eyes on the SIGN Conference

By Lewis Zirkle, M.D.

The theme of the 2016 SIGN Conference was Voyage of Discovery. Marcel Proust stated that “The voyage of discovery consists not of looking at new landscapes but in looking with new eyes”. We looked with new eyes at fracture healing, which is a familiar landscape for SIGN Surgeons. Each fracture is different and therefore we must discover patterns that surgeons can use to provide their patients with optimal treatment. These patterns must be studied using statistical analysis because there are many factors that affect fracture healing. As an example, fractures in younger patients in developing countries are more severe and involved.

Additional Opportunities

SIGN Surgeons had new options this year to choose from. Pre-conferences included a 1.5-day course in San Francisco directed toward soft-tissue coverage of fractures at UCSF under the sponsorship of IGOT. Many fractures in developing countries present with damage to the skin and muscles over the fracture, which must be treated properly.

A concurrent 1.5-day symposium on pelvic fracture, spinal trauma, and head trauma was held in partnership with Seattle Science Foundation. SIGN Surgeons learned how to treat more complex fractures in order to give complete orthopedic care to their patients.

Active Education

The SIGN Conference held sessions on treatment of bone deformity, pelvic fractures, and clubfoot treatment using Ponseti casting, in addition to presentations describing patterns of fracture treatment in developing countries. Many presentations prompted questions that we discussed in the spirit that together we know more than any one person. These questions will be the basis for future studies.

Becoming Better Surgeons

As the number of traumatic injuries increase, we must assist SIGN Programs to supply efficient and quality surgery for accident survivors. Presentations show ways for patients to be treated efficiently. Innovations of the SIGN Technique and Instruments are all directed toward the goal of faster and higher quality surgery. SIGN is starting new SIGN Programs, providing implants to treat more complex fractures, and collaborating with surgeons to provide more efficient surgery. The SIGN Model of education plus the donation of implants to implement the education to treat the poor is working.
Angelo’s Healing and Hope

By Dr. Jun Valera, Tebow CURE International Hospital, Davao City, Philippines

Angelo is a high school student, the eldest of three siblings. Like a typical kid from a poor family, he desires to finish school so he can help his family. His father works as a laborer picking coconuts for a living, a difficult and risky job with meager pay. His mother stays at home and takes care of the daily chores.

One afternoon on their way home from school, Angelo and his two other siblings were riding a motorcycle when a drunk truck driver hit them. They all sustained serious injuries but survived. Angelo had to be taken to a referral hospital five hours away. Both he and his sister sustained multiple fractures and had to be operated on. But Angelo had to be operated on 12 times, which caused him to stay in the hospital for more than a year. His father had to sell their pigs, chickens, and water buffalo to pay the medical bills. They were financially and emotionally drained. Angelo had complications in his femur and was given an option for amputation, but he vehemently refused and opted to go home instead. He was totally devastated and hopeless.

When we saw Angelo for the first time, my heart bled for this kid and his family. We admitted him and did surgery. We are very grateful that we had a SIGN Nail at hand. It was the perfect tool for this case. We had a hard time inserting the nail because his knee was almost fused with arthrofibrosis, and his knee cartilage was badly denuded. After putting in the SIGN Nail, we manipulated the knee and placed steroids and a local anesthetic to help in pain management.

After his surgery we saw a totally different kid. Just two months from his surgery, we saw Angelo walking for the first time in almost two years. Months have passed and Angelo is walking without crutches and his X-rays show very good healing. He has gone to a total of 14 surgeries, and I really admire the courage of this kid. His character spoke to me and gave me an additional motivation to continue SIGN’s mission of bringing forth equality of fracture care.

Now Angelo is back to school after two years of absence. He now works hard to finish his studies so he can work and help his family. SIGN allowed him to get up on his feet and go back to his ambition of becoming somebody someday. Thank you SIGN.
Dr. Tessema takes SIGN Equipment back to Black Lion Hospital.

The Ponseti Method helps surgeons correct clubfoot and prevent disability.

Seeing how the SIGN System is made prompts discussion among doctors and staff.

Shirts, scrubs, and bone-shaped pens were popular items at the SIGN store.

Engineer Paul DeVasConCellos explains changes to the SIGN System.

The sawbones session allows doctors to exchange ideas.

Dr. Zirkle learns the fine art of the Filipino finger.

Dr. Tom Vasileff and Dr. Bunn recall how they helped bring SIGN to Laos.

Dr. Steve Olson, President of the OTA, answers questions following his presentation.

Dr. Scott Levin instructs on soft tissue reconstruction.

The Ponseti Method helps surgeons correct clubfoot and prevent disability.

More 2016 conference photos can be viewed at signfracturecare.org/blog
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- IRA (minimum yearly distribution) and Legacy Giving—contact Sandy Brown, SIGN Business Administration Manager.
- Stock Transfers—contact Debbie Maier, SIGN Financial Analyst and Accounting Supervisor.

SIGN Staff can be contacted at (509) 371-1107.

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