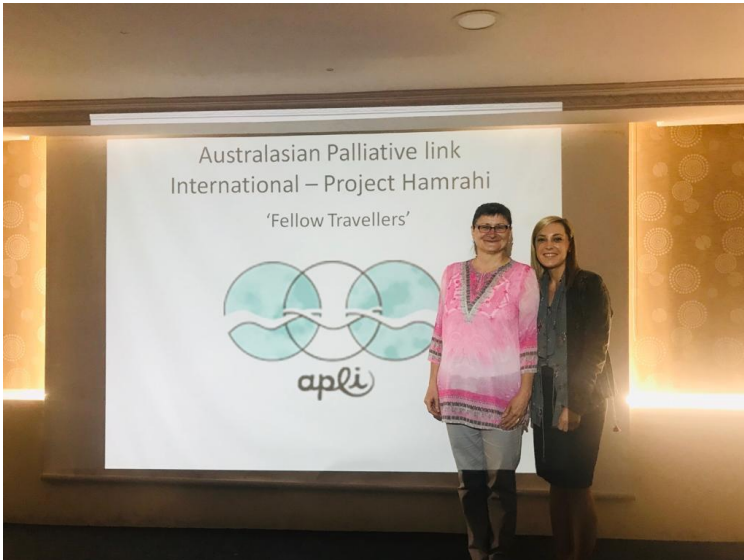


Maite and I spent an incredible 2 weeks as 'fellow travellers' in India in November/December 2018.

During this time, the Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry announced the establishment of a Task Force for Life Sustaining Treatment and Advance Care Planning, an exciting next step in the development of end-of-life care.

It was clear during our visit, that anyone involved in palliative care in Indian is embracing the proposed new definition of palliative care, which includes any severe health-related suffering, not just at the end of life.



Our 1<sup>st</sup> week was in Visakhapatnam ('Vizag') where we met the incredible Sneha Sandyha Age Care Foundation team, the only people providing aged and palliative care to the community. Governed by a generous Board of Trustees, the Foundation is largely managed and staffed by very dedicated and long-serving volunteers, both clinical and non-clinical.



*Some of the Vizag team, from left: Dr Sreedevi Warriar (Pallium India), Uma (Volunteer and Trustee), Satish (Project Officer Pallium India), Maite Uribe, Dr Raju NS (Volunteer and Managing Director), Dr Vidya Visvanath (Volunteer Palliative Care Doctor), Chris Drummond, Satya (Medical Social Worker), Supraja (Volunteer and Trustee)*



We attended a rural, Sunday medical camp, organised by Supraja, through her Rotary Club. Hundreds of village people arrived to receive basic preventative medical care, including blood pressure and blood glucose checks. A team of volunteer doctors from various specialities provided free consultations. Lunch was served to everyone and tribal dancing provided entertainment, especially when we participated!!



*Chris and Maite with Sneha Sandyha Foundation trustees and volunteers, Supraja and Uma, at the medical camp.*



It was an action-packed week with well-attended education sessions on palliative care, pain assessment and the interface between palliative care and ICU. Venues and participants (several hundred) included the nursing college, medical college, dental college, Indian Society of Anaesthesiologists, physiotherapy students and various clinicians at a private hospital. We also met many dignitaries, in support of the Foundation and the promotion of palliative care.

Satish Pulibanti, a project officer from Pallium India accompanied us all week, and our efforts have left him with many contacts and much work to do organising follow up education programmes and a public film night screening of 'Hippocratic'. We were also fortunate to have Dr Sreedevi Warriar, from Pallium India with us for the week to share in providing the education.



*Maite, Satish, Chris and Sreedevi with enthusiastic physiotherapy students!!*

We participated in an ECHO teaching session with several doctors across the country, including Dr Raju NS, Dr Vidya Viswanath and Dr Anasuya from the Foundation, discussing a geriatric case, and it was clear that we all share a similar approach and concerns with our elderly patients.

A visit to Homi Bhabha cancer centre, run out of shipping containers for the last 3 years whilst waiting for new buildings to be completed, was inspirational. There was a real focus on and understanding of palliative care, and an amazing 'can do' attitude from everyone, from the Medical Director to the allied health clinicians, laboratory technicians and cleaners. We have a lot to learn! Dr Vidya Viswanath works tirelessly there in a small clinic room, seeing patients from all over the state of Andhra Pradesh. All patients who present to the cancer centre are referred to her as a matter of routine, such is their belief in the value of palliative care.

We visited a free community geriatric clinic, held by the Aged Care Foundation in a wing of a home for the destitute, which also included an orphanage. What an amazing community; no-one is turned away. Those who can contribute to the work of the place do so, and those who are bed-ridden and cannot, are cared for, albeit with the bare necessities.

The 6-bed St Joseph's Hospice, in a small wing of a local private hospital, provides excellent care for patients and welcomes their families. The facilities are small but the care factor is huge!! We were fortunate to have delivered 2 syringe drivers to them and educated the nurses on their use. Apparently, they are being used frequently.

There was time for buying some beautiful silks, team dinners and walking along the beach front. We could not have felt more cared for, with meals at the homes of Foundation members and a volunteers' dinner, at which we were honorary guests, at the home of Mr PVGK Murthy, Founder and Chair of the Foundation. What a joyous celebration, with music, everyone invited to give a speech about being a volunteer, good food and great company.

We are really looking forward to an ongoing relationship with these wonderful people and helping with further education.

Our 2<sup>nd</sup> week in India was in Tripura, based in the Regional Cancer Centre in Agartala, where we quickly found ourselves meeting with the State Health Minister and advocating for a State Palliative Care Policy and Plan, aligned with the National Strategy.

It was my 4<sup>th</sup> visit to Tripura, the last one having been 3 years ago, and it was clear that we had developed strong professional relationships and respect. Once again, we had wonderful support from Pallium India, with Shalini, the Project Officer for north-east India, made available to accompany us during the week. She was certainly a god-send, assisting us to navigate some tricky political and cultural aspects of our visit.



*Shalini, Maite, Minister of Health, Tripura, Chris and Dr Gautam Majumdar, holding a Draft Palliative Care Policy for Tripura*

But before we even arrived, we found ourselves in the situation of having to consider how we could support a doctor caring for a mechanically ventilated man on the plane! Maite quickly discovered that the man was being transported home to die but that there was no plan in place, should that happen mid-flight. She assisted the doctor with the man's care, including his ventilation and has maintained an ongoing professional relationship with him, as this experience was the first time he had considered his role as a physician from the perspective of the patient and his family. A revelation!





The week in Tripura was filled with education sessions, formal and informal, from packed lecture theatres to bedside teaching at the Cancer Centre and the Medical College. We visited regional hospitals and introduced the concept of palliative care to a multi-disciplinary group of staff there. Overall, we helped educate several hundred clinicians, with Shalini giving the local perspective. We were also able to provide practical advice regarding the care of patients in the cancer centre and were pleased to find new doctors trying to promote the practice of palliative care into their work and systems.

It was clear that there is a constant struggle to navigate political and cultural systems in Tripura, in order to improve care. It is a slow process that often frustrates those trying to make a difference, with disconnects between theoretical knowledge and practice apparent at every level. Despite the regular frustrations, such as that morphine is only available at the Cancer Centre, the champions of palliative care, especially Dr Majumdar, need us and were very grateful for our advocacy and support. Even more, the people of Tripura need as much advocacy and education as possible; their struggles are immense.



*Maite and Chris attending to a wound dressing in the Regional Cancer Centre, Agartala*

We look forward to returning to India in February 2020, for site visits and attendance at IAPCCON.