India is a vast and varied country with a population of a billion, of which 70 million are disabled—more than the population of the UK. I was looking forward to returning to my homeland and to working alongside those on the Lifeline Express. While the word Delhi may conjure up images of crowding, poverty and sickness, Delhi domestic terminal was like any other European airport—all Jasper Conran-designed hotels, five-star cuisine, designer shops and even a place to grab a coffee and a chocolate muffin. It seems Delhi has changed incredibly since my last visit. After a good evening meal (during which I choked over the wine list, as luxury items cost three times more than in London; yet everyday living costs less than one-third), I caught the red-eye flight from Delhi to Jabalpur in one third), I caught the red-eye flight from Delhi to Jabalpur in three years ago.

Touching down in Jabalpur, the Madhya Pradesh state. Jabalpur is just like many other small towns in India: low rise, an army presence and an air of extreme heat. A quick tour revealed a complete contrast. A solitary, simple, small, plain concrete terminus greeted us, revealed a complete contrast. A deserted. Lt Col Randhir S Virk, Not only was the platform had been specially parked in the siding, where brightly painted wagons was consisting of six or seven types of operations could be performed. So at 9 am on the dot, I arrived at the platform ready, willing and able to only find the place virtually deserted. Lt Col Randhir S Virk (who runs the Lifeline Express) invited me into his office for a cup of tea. In the nicest possible way, he explained that the only way to "get things moving" was to go straight to the 'District Col-lector'. He is the area head of local government and in India holds a position of considerable power and influence. He agreed to mobilise his network of officials to ensure that all in the town and outlying villages would be aware of the visit. The Collector also wanted to meet 'the dentist from London', and so at the daily appointed hour he arrived for the inaugural ceremony of the dental suite. He assured me that he was committed to spreading the word and promised me many patients for the next day. To prove his point, he brought along the local television station tum to interview me (which was aired that night!).

The following morning I was raring to go. I hadn’t been this excited about going to work for years. So at 9 am on the dot, I arrived at the platform ready, willing and able only to find the place virtually deserted. Lt Col Randhir S Virk (who runs the Lifeline Express) invited me into his office for a cup of tea. In the nicest possible way, he explained that in India when a doctor says he starts at 9 am he never arrives before 10!
As a result, patients never turn up before 10.15. The team from the dental college arrived at 9.50. I had thought they would send dental nurses to assist me, but to my surprise two dentists, Dr Mangesh Ghate and the newly qualified Dr Pratiba Patel, a hygienist, Amos; and our nurse, Reena, welcomed me. Dr Ghate explained that as it was my first day they wanted to ensure I was fully supported! He proposed that as it was likely to be very busy we concentrate on those most in need. Dr Patel and he would initially screen the patients and any non-urgent cases would be asked to return at a later date.

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True to the Colonel’s word, at 10.15 the first patients arrived and by 11.00 we had a queue of twenty people. We turned the lecture facility into a waiting and post-op room. Extractions and scaling were the order of the day. Many patients had never visited a dentist in their life and most had travelled enormous distances to be treated. By lunchtime, I had removed 84 teeth and I was pleased with the results. By lunchtime, I had removed 84 teeth and I was pleased with the results.

Some of those I examined had difficulty in opening their mouths and on further investigation, I noticed clinical changes on the buccal mucosa consistent with chewing tobacco and betel nut. By lunchtime, I had removed 84 teeth and I was pleased with the results. By lunchtime, I had removed 84 teeth and I was pleased with the results.

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