When global surgery gets personal

Given the statistics, it’s likely that many of you reading this article have undergone or will undergo, a surgical procedure at some point in your life. In fact, given the professional makeup of the Rotarian community, it’s likely that many of you have actually performed a surgical procedure.

This means you understand all too well the life changing, life saving impact of a safe operation. You will also understand the crises faced by 31 million people worldwide who risk their lives every year with unsafe emergency caesarean sections, bone resetting or hemia repair, because they have no other choice.

Lifebox Foundation is a global health charity based in the UK that believes safe surgery is a right, not a privilege. It delivers an essential piece of monitoring equipment - a pulse oximeter along with an education programme to hospitals around the world and is proud to be working with Rotary clubs within RIBI to make a difference.

“It falls nicely into the concept of Rotary and we feel that Lifebox is doing a worldwide job that is extremely necessary” explained Dr Keith Budd, Secretary of the Rotary Club of Ilkley Wharfedale and a retired consultant in pain medicine.

A pulse oximeter is the single most important monitoring device in modern anaesthesia, something that doctors at the club had no trouble explaining to their non-medical members when they hosted an Indian evening to support the Lifebox mission.

Rotarians support practical projects, rolling up their sleeves for change you can count in real numbers. Here are some numbers worth consideration:

The risk of dying from surgery in Africa is up to a thousand times greater than in the UK. This is devastating for healthcare workers as well as for patients and their families. Day after day, medical professionals go into the operating theatre without the resources they need to do their job safely. Yet day after day they go back, because they have no choice but to try to save life as best they can.

It costs just £160 to send a Lifebox to a hospital anywhere in the world, along with a training programme proven to reduce the risk of error and complication in surgery by more than 40 percent. Yet more than 70,000 operating theatres around the world still lack access to this essential equipment and education, putting millions of lives at risk.

Rotarians are citizens of the world as well as their immediate community, and their support stretches way beyond Great Britain and Ireland. Over the last year, many clubs across Europe, America and Africa have given the gift of safer surgery to those who need it most.

Donations can be directed to specific colleagues or countries – as with the Rotary Club of Portishead, who sent their oximeters to a hospital in Zanzibar where a neighbouring club already had a relationship.

Bringing 70,000 down to zero is a real challenge, but it is also a real number and we know that we can do it – especially with the support of an organisation renowned for taking on the most difficult challenges and seeing them through to the end.

For more information visit lifebox.org, call 0203 286 0402 or visit us in the House of Friendship at the Birmingham conference in April.