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Doctor returns from India pro-bono surgery tour

The morning after an intercontinental flight, Dr. Shashi Kusuma was back in his Florida office.

Kusuma had spent a little less than two weeks in India, teaming with three other Indian-American plastic surgeons to help change the lives of more than two dozen people.

"The whole state is really limited in physicians, especially plastic surgeons," he said. "These patients were waiting for somebody like us to come and help them."

Kusuma has been working at Westside Regional Medical Center in Plantation for almost a year and has practiced plastic surgery for five years.

He originally had plans to pursue a degree in business, but he met inspiring surgeons who changed his mind. He has done both cosmetic and reconstructive surgery, as do most doctors.

Kusuma, who serves as

president of the American Society of Indian Plastic Surgeons, coordinated the trip with the other surgeons, who are members of the group. Born and raised in Hyderabad, in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, he realized the small population of plastic surgeons in the country could use help reaching out to people who needed procedures done.

"We feel a connection because we are Indian Americans," he said. "There's a connection to our place of ancestry. There's a true, strong need because in India, there's only about six or seven hundred plastic surgeons for the entire country."

That's equal to the number of surgeons in South Florida alone, he said.

In four days, the doctors saw 100 patients and chose to perform surgery on 25. Most were children with burns, trauma,

wounds or congenital defects.

After waking up from surgeries — which were performed free of charge — the children found their cleft lips and palates repaired, or scars that had haunted them for years gone.

"They were emotional, completely blown away," Kusuma said. "We were blown away [at] the same [time]. It is such a gratifying thing to do."

One patient, a woman in her 30s, had been abused and had suffered major burns to her chest and breasts. Abandoned by her family, she was living in a homeless shelter. Her perseverance and determination to make a living touched the doctors, and they started a series of breast reconstruction surgeries.

"She was able to pull her life together even in this horrible social situation she was in," Kusuma said.



HERO DOCTOR Dr. Shashi Kusuma, fourth from right, recently returned from a trip to India where he performed free plastic surgery on patients with a variety of ailments. He was joined by other members of the American Society of Indian Plastic Surgeons, and they plan on returning for follow-ups and to help others. SUBMITTED PHOTO

Kusuma said he and his group want to go back to do more surgeries and follow up with patients in or-

der to track their progress. Most of all, he hopes to spread the word about medical needs in India.

The goal is to eventually upgrade operating rooms and provide better supplies for Indian doctors.