I returned from Timor-Leste three weeks ago. The highlight of this visit was travelling to the remote villages in the Zumalai sub-district and experiencing all the happenings that need to take place to enable a Mobile Medical Clinic to operate.

Firstly, two Carmelite sisters, two Timorese clinic helpers and all the pharmaceutical supplies were collected from the Carmelite Bobonaro Medical Clinic. This was a six hour return drive for Brother Antonio around narrow, very windy mountainous roads. The drive also encountered torrential rain in a number of places. The new van used for the clinics has a very strong canopy, so once all the supplies were put into the van they were safe from the rain. However, while carrying the cardboard boxes of medical supplies to the van many did not escape the rain so when the sisters and helpers arrived in Zumalai their first task was to empty the medical supplies that were in wet boxes and dispose of them.

The clinics began the following day. They operated in the mornings in the villages and in the afternoons on the Carmelite Compound. The afternoon sessions began at 6pm and went until 9pm. The early afternoon is always siesta in Timor-Leste because it is the hottest time of the day. We Left at 8am each morning to visit the villages. All the clinics except one were held in front of or on the verandah of private homes. One was held in a church. We were very lucky to have six days without rain.

The procedure for the clinic was:

1. **Registration** – Two young men from Zumalai wrote down the name, age and place where each person was born on a small piece of paper. These men needed to be able to speak 3 languages between them in order to be able to cover all the languages. Many of the older people were illiterate but did bring their ID cards with them. Many also did not know their age. The piece of paper was then brought to the Carmelite nurse who was more like a doctor.

2. **Consultation** - A private consultation was then given to each person by Sr Angela (the nurse/doctor). She wrote down in a book her diagnosis of the medical condition of each person and also the medicines and...
injections that she was prescribing for each person. The patient took the prescription to another sister and helper.

3. The Pharmacy — The sisters brought a large supply of medicines with them to Zumalai. The majority of these medicines were from Indonesia and some from Australia. After the consultations were finished those who needed injections received them. The people were asked to give a USD1 donation towards the clinic if they could afford it.

The following statistics about Timor-Leste are an improvement since Independence but still tell a dismal story:

* Timor-Leste has one of the highest maternal and infant mortality rates in the world – 42 out of 1,000 infants born alive die before their first birthday
* Only 10% of women attend health facilities to give birth
* Life expectancy is low 67 years of age
* Half the population lacks safe drinking water
* An estimated 41% of the nation’s million or so people live below the poverty line

I was surprised at the number of young children and babies who had bad colds and nasal and throat infections. Skin infections were also prevalent among the children. One lady was later taken back to the Sister’s own clinic where she could be given further treatment for the swelling of her legs and arms.

The Mobile Medical Clinic has been a wonderful help to the people of Zumalai sub-district. The government health clinic is too far to walk for many of the people in the villages and when I visited Zumalai in October/November this clinic had completely finished all of its medical supplies.

The Timorese Sisters were also struck by the high numbers of sick people in this remote sub-district of Zumalai. They have therefore offered to run more mobile medical clinics in 2011. Any donations towards the medical supplies would therefore be greatly appreciated.

Christmas Blessings and a Special Thank-You to all the friends and supporters of the Carmelites during 2010
From
The Children and Carmelites in Timor-Leste

Rosemary Patterson rsm
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Rosemary Patterson