



Dr Paul Bergamo's Life Changing Hands on India Trip

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A chance conversation at last year's ACA Conference planted a seed in Dr Paul Bergamo's mind that would soon grow into a life-changing trip in remote areas of India.

"Last year's ACA Annual Conference in August was a full weekend for me," Paul recalls. "I'd organised a 30-year reunion with my 1995 RMIT cohort on the Friday night, so it was busy."

"Somewhere in that mix, a conversation changed things."

That something was a chat with Dr Andrea Huddleston, one of the ACA's 2025 Chiropractors of the Year, who mentioned Hands on India, an organisation whose mission is to help break the poverty cycle in marginalised rural communities in West Bengal.

"Andrea didn't just suggest Hands on India, she persisted," Paul explains.

"To be honest, she was persuasive enough that I agreed to look into it."

Look into it he did, and by the Sunday afternoon of the Conference, he'd spoken to Dr Andrew Moulton, one of the leaders of Hands on India's 2026 trip, and provisionally signed up.

Although Paul was not all in just yet.

"I'm pretty black and white with decisions," he says. "I told Andrew, 'Give me seven days. I'm either 120% in, or I'm out.'"

Seven days later, Paul was all in, and five months later, he was on the plane to take part in Hands on India's latest expedition. Each year, a team from the organisation delivers neuromusculoskeletal care on the ground in West Bengal. With a population of between 90 and 106 million, the Eastern Indian region is one of the nation's most populous states and is incredibly economically important.

Despite this, approximately one-fifth of the population lives below the poverty line, highlighting the importance of trips such as those conducted by Hands on India.

In total, 19 chiropractors and four assistants embarked on the two-week trip. Over the course of the next fortnight, this dedicated crew travelled daily to three remote villages, setting up makeshift clinics and providing chiropractic care and basic health support to 2,321 people – many of whom would otherwise have had little or no access to these services.

As Paul describes, each and every day was full "in every sense of the word."

"We'd start the day at 6:30am with Pilates led by Izzy, then head out to clinics that were anything but typical," he says.

"We worked across three remote locations in West Bengal, one inside a church, one outside a church, and one under a 100-year-old bamboo tree. Each took about an hour in a

4WD to reach."

"What really made the experience was the people," he adds.

Providing complex treatments in unfamiliar environments naturally posed their own challenges, yet with such a great mix of experienced and newly graduated chiropractors, spirits were always high amongst the Hands on India team.

"Despite the intensity of the work, there was a lot of laughter," he explains.

"The younger practitioners were learning in real time, guided by the senior chiropractors, particularly those experienced in SOT techniques."

Evenings were then filled with CPD sessions covering a range of topics, including practice management and neurology.

"It was immersive, challenging, and incredibly rewarding," Paul stresses, before insisting the trip was both a career highlight and an incredibly life-changing experience.

"I've been in practice for 30 years, including 25 years running a multi-disciplinary clinic in Boronia, Victoria. Over that time, I've been fortunate to have a very active and diverse career, involving everything from a decade lecturing in nutrition at RMIT and CQU, through to leadership roles, including serving as the final CAA President of Victoria," Paul says.

"But from a professional perspective, this experience in India was incredibly grounding. You're working with people who have very little, yet the level of gratitude they show for even the smallest amount of care is something that really stays with you."

At a raw level, Paul's involvement reaffirmed the power and importance of chiropractic and its ability to inspire results regardless of the circumstances under which care is delivered.

"We stripped everything back. No technology, no scans, no distractions. Just assessment and hands-on care, like when chiropractic started as a profession," he says.

"In many cases, especially neurological ones, we were low force with the cervical spine.





We were working through thoracic and lumbar regions, focusing on function, with manual adjustments. We would assess brain function by assessing cranial nerve function, especially by assessing eye movements.”

Changes would be small, but incredibly meaningful. Gait would improve. Postures would shift. There were even moments of a better finger tapping response in a Parkinson’s patient, from a pre- and immediate post-check comparison.

These moments combined into a single great reinforcement of chiropractic practice, which, when applied well, can make a world of difference, even in the simplest of environments.

Two cases in particular have really stuck with Paul since his return home.

In 2015, Paul completed his Diplomate of Neurology/DACNB through Carrick Institute. On the trip, that training was incredibly relevant as he spent most of the time handling new neurological presentations.

During an eight-hour day, Paul would see eight separate, complicated cases, most often strokes. Each would require the full hour to locate where a neurological lesion was.

“What struck me was how little I needed,” he says.

“A hammer, a pinwheel, and a torch. That was it.”

“In one case, a mother brought in her daughter, who clearly had cerebral palsy. She had this quiet hope that we could fix her with one treatment.”

“Through our interpreter, we had to gently explain that this was a lifelong condition that couldn’t simply be resolved.”

“She was very upset, which brought a tear to my eye; the enormity of her situation hit home.”

That conversation and that case have stayed with Paul, as has another case involving a man in his 60s who suffered a stroke when he was 16. For the better part of 50 years, he hadn’t received a single day of rehabilitation, resulting in several complications, including a deformed foot.



“At the end of the consult, through the interpreter, I said I’d see him again in a few days,” Paul explains.

“He smiled broadly, said ‘Namaste,’ and walked away, no cane, no support, like he had done for the last 50 years.”

“And I remember thinking, every single step he’s taken since he was 16 has been that difficult. And yet, his attitude was calm, grateful, and resilient.”

“That stays with you.”



Beyond the professional, Paul experienced an immense personal perspective shift.

“When you’re exposed to genuine third-world poverty, not through a TV screen, but standing in front of you, it recalibrates what matters. You start to sweat the small stuff a lot less,” he says.

In short, Paul returned with a greater appreciation of everything we have in Australia.

For Paul, any chiropractor thinking about taking part in a Hands on India trip should do so for one simple reason: it accelerates



your growth in your skills, elevates your confidence, and shifts your perspective.

“One example is Emily, a fresh, new graduate from Murdoch University who had not seen a patient yet as a chiropractor. I worked closely with her throughout the trip, and the progression was clear. Initially, very understandably, a little uncertain and unsure,” he explains.

“By the final days, she had rhythm, confidence, and flow, treating patients efficiently and effectively. That kind of growth doesn’t happen sitting in a seminar room.”

“I have spoken to Em since our return, and I am not surprised to hear that she is now flying in practice in her first chiropractic job.”



Across two weeks, the crew supported six schools and saw nearly 700 children, worked with tea plantation workers, rock breakers, and families and communities who relied on their bodies every day. Amongst all this, Paul believes it’s impossible to ignore the reality of Hands on India trips.

“This isn’t just about chiropractic,” he says. *“It’s about giving back.”*

Expressions of interest for 2027’s Hands on India trip are now open. New graduates and experienced chiropractors are encouraged to apply for this eye-opening expedition. For more information, visit:

handsonindia.org.au/upcoming ■