

Recent D-5470 International Rotary project

Health care in the high Nubri Valley region of Nepal

By Nancy Kerr, M.D. - Rotary Club of Telluride

The Telluride Rotary Club is helping to sponsor health clinics in the high Nubri Valley region of Nepal, in the Himalayan “foothills” since 2014, even before the devastating earthquake of April 2015. This area is beautiful and rugged, but because it is not on the way to Everest it has not elicited much international attention or funding.



Manaslu, the beautiful yet treacherous mountain above the village of Sama

Most of the clinics lie at 9000 to 12000 feet, higher even than our Telluride 8,750-foot elevation. Initially two of our club members, physicians Mark Hauswald and Nancy Kerr, became familiar with the clinics when asked by the local Buddhist lama, Lama Jigme, to do a health needs assessment for the area when they led global health seminars for US physicians through the area. Many of the health needs identified are the same primary care issues that we see in small town Colorado: respiratory infections, asthma, hypertension, trauma, and infectious diseases of childhood (respiratory and diarrhea). Some antenatal care and deliveries are performed. Rapid transport out of town is only by helicopter, otherwise it is a 5-day trek to the nearest hospital (and that is in summer.) Health facilities in the villages along the trail in this high valley are small, and are theoretically funded and staffed by the Nepal government. Unfortunately, the funds and staff often do not fully materialize.

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Fortunately Nepal Seeds, an NGO located in the US and Nepal has helped provide educational resources, and collaborated with Mark and Nancy in recruiting a British NGO, Community Action Nepal (CAN), to assist in running the clinics.



Clinic in Sama, with nurses, the Lama, and Mark, Nancy and another US doctor.

Initially the Telluride Rotary club donated funds to hire 2 nurses at the clinic in Sama for 3 years. Then in 2016 (following the earthquake) CAN requested help in purchasing medical equipment for the four clinics they now operate in the Nubri Valley. The Telluride club provided funds for, purchased and transported the equipment (with help from Nepal Seeds.) Nine Masimo portable Pronto Hemoglobin meters (for checking anemia) and 13 oxygen sensors (finger pulse oximeters) were purchased by our club (approximately \$10,000 worth of equipment.) Two colleagues from Nepal Seeds transported and delivered the devices from the US to Nepal, trained the nurses in their use, and followed up on them six months later. The hemoglobin meters are now in use in the four clinics mentioned, and the pulse oximeters in 13 of the CAN run clinics within Nepal.

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Telluride Rotary club will continue to follow up on these medical projects over the ensuing years. We are pleased to find that collaboration with other NGO's with local expertise and presence is effective in providing improved health care options to the Nepali people of the high Nubri Valley.



Beautiful little girl from along the trail. (Head shaved to minimize lice.)