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Clinical Attachment at Chaurjahari Hospital, Nepal

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It was the early missionary doctors who came to Hong Kong to serve poor fishermen with free medical care that touched me to disembark for Nepal. The medical care that we enjoy today is never possible without their devotion and commitment to spreading the love that God has for all nations. History says western medicine was a tool to convert people to Christianity, but the Bible says God uses us as His witnesses to the end of the earth. What I see is that early missionary doctors are vessels for good works among the needy!

I have always wanted to be like them. I want to know what motivated them to devote their lives to foreign people across oceans. I want to be with the poor, as God is where misfortune is. I want to be used and be sent to show them that the kingdom of God has come – this was my prayer as I took from Kathmandu my 1 hour domestic flight, a 6-hour bumpy jeep ride and a 15-minute hike to Chaurjahari, a village in the West Rukum district of Nepal.

God is so loving that He gave me bonuses when I asked of nothing but Him. I spent 3 weeks in Chaurjahari Hospital longing to serve in wherever needed of me. While my friends attached at different specialties in hospitals to explore their future options, I just wanted to know if working in a less developed place is my calling. I was hungry for clinical experience just like all medical students, but my learning objective was clear this time – to be where God is. Not only did He answer to me every day with His presence in everything I do, I was also blessed with the opportunities to perform gynaecological examinations and antenatal checkups, assist surgeries and give presentations to doctors. Not speaking Nepali, I prepared myself for a lot of quiet devotional me-time, but in the end I spent most of my time with many passionate medical workers worshipping and sharing the Gospel, enjoying the blessing of fellowship, because God breaks through all cultural and language barriers to be within us Christians when we gather in His name. The doctors always challenged my standards spiritually and academically. We would pray together as a team before operations. I looked up to their fine surgical skills, but they humbly told me that their hands would only work if it is for the glory of God. The doctors always encouraged me to think critically; they told me that your brain is your best resource when conditions are limited.

I asked God to let me see the poor, but what I saw in these Nepali people is strength and endurance. My favourite patient was a paraplegic middle-aged man who wheelchairs himself into the dressing room for his bed-sore everyday. He has one of the brightest smile I have ever seen. I would go say 'Namaste' to him every time I needed a boost of energy. There would always be women coming in with their children walking four days to get treated for pneumonia. I saw external fixations being taken out from kids without analgesia. Their cries broke my heart, but the villagers told me how theirs was broken instead by a family member dying of dehydration from diarrhoea a few decades ago. They were really grateful for what the hospital can do, and what we see as basic in Hong Kong would be regarded as a privilege in Chaurjahari. In Hong Kong, we use advanced technology to make diagnoses, we strive to give the newest drugs to patients, yet many still lie in our wards grumpy and miserable. Chaurjahari Hospital allowed me to see medical care could cater to simple and basic human needs, that hospital beds are reserved for patients who come from afar until they recover and are well enough to make their journey back, that antibiotics and fluids are able to save the lives of many, and that you can make a patient feel much better just by auscultating them. I believe that such needs are universal, and rather than the medicine itself, it is the relationship that we build with patients through providing medical care that fulfils them.

I saw the need of patients in Nepal in the morning devotions of all medical staff. Hymns with familiar tunes but unfamiliar Nepali lyrics lead me to the meeting room first thing in the morning. The staff all have the lyrics to their hearts. As the guitar plays, everyone joins in drumming the tables, Bibles, or whatever you have on hand. Then someone stands up to lead a prayer and share the word of God to start the day. Among the staff sitting on the green benches around the room, you sometimes find paediatric patients sitting in the gathering, waiting for familiar faces to respond to their shy smiles. As you leave for morning rounds, patients crowding the corridor outside the meeting room greet you, after having enjoyed (some of) the music and shared a taste of the Gospel. I see the ultimate answer to their curiosity as Jesus, manifested through the good works that the team does in Chaurjahari. I also believe this is what motivates the doctors and the locals here to love and serve the community so passionately.

Sometimes I feel uncomfortable with the heat and the mud in Chaurjahari, that nothing is free from dust unless when you are in the shower. We regard that as 'dirt' back here in Hong Kong. Oh but what is cleanliness, when we coexist with numerous bacteria in our guts? There is a chance of contamination even when we wash our hands with soap and put on gloves in the operation theatre. We are never free of dirt, especially when we are sinners who need salvation. As I diligently tried to wipe off the dust on my body in the first few days, I started to see how much more 'dusty' my inner self is, filled with arrogance, anger and hatred. But it is with Jesus that we are healed, restored perfectly imperfect just as He has intended. This free salvation is indeed intended for everyone.

My prayer is still the same as I leave Chaurjahari - I long to give this good news to the poor. From 3000 kilometres away, I am still strengthened by these peers who rectifies the love of God through actions every day. I am especially thankful to my mentors Dr. Kaleb and Dr. Sadychia, who show me how you will be abundantly blessed when you seek first the Kingdom of God. My prayer now extends to Chaurjahari. May God be with them in whatever they do and strengthen their faith as they go extra miles for Him.



My mentors Dr. Sadychia, Dr. Kaleb, their daughter and I