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### OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF PROJECTS ABROAD NEPAL



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## **British Physiotherapist Students Learn About Care in Nepal by Natalie Travis & Jenna Weeks**

We are physiotherapy students from England, and visited Nepal during the summer break before completing our final year at University. We chose Nepal because of the many and varied Physiotherapy placements in the country that would help to widen our experience of culture and disease. We were also drawn to Nepal by the infamously friendly and welcoming nature of the people, the wildlife and of course the biggest mountain range in the world!

Our trip to Nepal could not have been further from our expectations. We have had the most fantastic time learning a completely new way of life, being welcomed into a wonderful Nepali family and working in a rural hospital over the last five weeks.

We stayed in Banepa, a bus-ride from Kathmandu, at Lok's house. We could not have wished for a better host – Lok loves having volunteers to stay, teaching them all there is to know about the Nepali culture and having the opportunity to practice his English! From the first day we felt like part of the family; joining Lok on his morning countryside walks, getting up at 5:30am for Yoga and sharing many cups of 'chiya' – Nepalese tea!



We volunteered at Scheer Memorial Hospital, just a short five minute walk from Lok's house. We worked with the outpatients Physiotherapy team as part of the wider hospital which included medical and surgical wards, paediatrics and Intensive Care. The physiotherapists have a very different way of working compared to the UK, and the patients have very different complaints – it wasn't uncommon for people to have injuries from being stepped on by a Yak, or falling out of a mango tree!



We were also very lucky to see some other areas of Physiotherapy during our trip. We visited the Muscular Dystrophy centre in Bhaktapur, a small rehabilitation centre for young children with degenerative muscle weakness. We had great fun playing games and watching their art class – they have the most fantastic talent for oil painting and the artwork is their only source of funding – we couldn't resist taking one home. Secondly we really enjoyed the Projects Abroad 'dirty days' at the Nutritional Rehabilitation Hospital for malnourished children near Patan. Here we filed down and painted beds and played with the children all day in the sunshine – it was hard work but great fun and a great way to meet some other volunteers.



On the weekends we had time to explore the country! We travelled for nine hours to reach Pokhara in the mountains and took in the many sights in the Kathmandu Valley. By far our best trip was the eight-hour hike to Namobuddha, east of Kathmandu. The trek was entirely uphill, muddy and hot but it was worth every step thanks to the beautiful Buddhist monasteries and breath-taking views. The peak is lined with millions of Tibetan prayer flags, used by Buddhist monks to spread their prayers of love and peace to the world through the wind. It was a magical trip.

Nepal has exceeded our expectations on so many levels. Despite having very little, the people give so much and are the friendliest we've ever met. We've learnt that the material things we rely on so much at home are of little importance here (who needs electricity at night?!) and the relaxed pace of life allows people to spend more time together and enjoy each day.



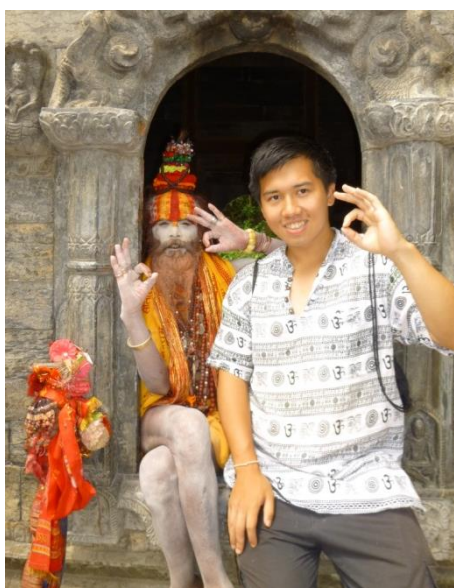
If you are considering a trip to Nepal, do not hesitate! It is the most beautiful country with such welcoming people. There are so many opportunities for volunteers and for us, it was an experience we will never forget.

Jenna and Natalie (June 2013)\*

#### **Gap Year Volunteer Eamonn Experiences Life in a Nepali Hospital by Eamonn Lim**

My name is Eamonn and I am 19. I am currently on a gap year between college and studying medicine in London, UK. I'd volunteered in Borneo before and I enjoyed it so much that I wanted to do more, and decided to spend 6 weeks in Nepal.

The projects abroad team advised me how to adjust to life in Nepal, but nothing could prepare me for the heat, wonderful aromas of food, the colourful shops and the choking fumes of the traffic. Nepal overloaded my senses and I knew from the start my 6 week stay would be a memorable experience.



My placement was based in the town of Bharatpur in the district of Chitwan. The city is quite small compared to Kathmandu and is built around a central main road. There is also the Chitwan National park (30minutes drive away), where you can go elephant riding and bathing.

My host family were very kind and understanding. Whenever I felt uncomfortable about my habits from the UK, the host father would reassure me that they did not mind - Nepali people are very laid back. I did not find there to be a language barrier as long as I spoke slowly and clearly.

I worked at Chitwan Medical College Teaching Hospital (CMC), which was 30minutes walk from my host family. Being a pre-medical student with no training, I was to only observe doctors and nurses. I thought it

would be similar to the UK medical work experience, following one doctor who would spoon-feed me information, and a very strict patient confidentiality regime. I was surprised to find it was the complete opposite.

My first week was spent in ER (emergency room). The ward accommodated around 30 beds, each designated for triage. I was not assigned to a doctor so I had the freedom to wander around and see different cases. I was also free to look at patient notes, use the computer to research, and to take vitals of any patients not being seen to. All of the patient notes are in English as the medical course in Nepal is taught in English.

I usually arrived at 9am and stayed till 2 or 3 pm. Throughout the week, I became friends with the staff and they allowed me to help give IV therapy and assist doctors with suturing. The Nepali people (staff and patients) were all very friendly and were always trying to teach me Nepali. They always smiled and laughed throughout the shift, quite a contrast to the solemn doctors back home. I enjoyed ER a lot, and gained a lot of experience.

The care system is all privatised. If patients want a diagnosis they must purchase a ticket for 200nrs (£1.50). A family member of the patient must buy all the implements used by the doctor (e.g. cannulas, medication), and has to care for the patient for their stay in the hospital.

The other departments I saw were: Operating Theatre (OT), Dermatology ward, Maternity ward and Dentistry. In all of these wards, I had freedom to come and go as I pleased. The doctors and nurses were all nice in each ward but I had to take the initiative to talk to them before they explained anything to me.

The first surgery I saw in OT was a vaginal hysterectomy. I've never seen so much blood before! I saw a variety of surgeries during my stay, ranging from bone reductions for fractures to nasal endoscopies. The surgeons did not mind where I stood as long as it was out of the way.

I observed dentistry in a health camp within the national park. It was a day trip, where volunteers, doctors and nurses left from the hospital to go to nearby villages and offer free healthcare. With limited equipment, the dentist was only able to remove teeth or advise the patient on dental care. The health camp was completely packed, and we could only leave once everyone had been seen.

### **Travelling at the Weekend**

I am happy that my whole Nepal experience was not limited to hospital based work. I met a lot of awesome volunteers from all over the world who all helped me learn about healthcare in other countries.

During my stay, I managed to go to Lumbini, Kathmandu, Pokhara and I even did the bungy jump at the Last Resort as I chose not to work during the weekends. Trekking in Nepal is a must. Our group of 6 decided to do the Annapurna Base Camp trek without Poon Hill in 7 days. The views were spectacular, the air was clean and crisp, and the sense of achievement was satisfying.



Overall, my Nepal experience was unforgettable. I feel that I left more mature, open minded and confident. I thoroughly enjoyed working in the hospital and the change of lifestyle. I hope you embrace Nepal and have as much fun as I did!

## Cupping comes to Kathmandu by Anne Robinson

Cupping is an ancient form of therapy, especially useful for tight knotted shoulders and muscular back problems amongst other things. At first glance it looks easy, but to do it well takes practice. Two physiotherapists were really keen to learn about it, seeing many situations in which they could use it. It has the same effect as a deep massage, but is much less painful!

As I had come to expect, they wanted to extract the maximum amount of fun out of the training, and were really keen to practice on each other. After one session they were convinced they were competent, and whilst I admired their confidence, I felt they had more to learn. With gently bullying, I encouraged them to practice until they got to a stage where I felt they were safe to treat the general public.

I didn't see any golf courses in Kathmandu, but I sometimes thought my clinic acted in that capacity. Not in the way of exercise and fresh air, but in the way of the 'commerce' that happens whilst strolling between holes.

My patient was in the middle of his treatment when his phone rang...'my friend is coming' he announced. Meanwhile one of the clinic directors popped in for some cupping. The friend duly arrived, a very distinguished looking gentleman with real shoes (not sandals or flip flops) and dressed very smartly. He sat down and a 3 way conversation/discussion ensued which appeared to get quite lively at times. My patient then turned to me and said 'this is Mr .....' he's a member of the Government'.....and they carried on with their discussion.

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Interrupted by the arrival of the next patient, they all left still in deep discussion. It was one of the situations where I wished I had command of the Nepali language.

Another time the physiotherapists I worked with invited me to a short lunchtime seminar they were all attending. It was about stroke, so I went along to be polite. We took our shoes off and entered a large room, completely empty except for a white board. We sat on the floor! I am beginning to wonder about the relevance of chairs. 3 of them took it in turns to 'present', using one of their number as a demo body. All their terminology is in English so I understood the odd phrase like 'range of movement' or 'plantar flexion'. Of course the 'body' wasn't behaving and everyone was laughing (Nepalese love to laugh) and I came away uplifted although none the wiser technically.

One morning I visited a nearby stupa (Buddhist temple) which happens to be the largest in Asia. I stopped to make a small purchase from a monk who had the most gentle eyes I've ever seen. He blessed it for me and then started talking about karma. About how people come to the temple to see only with their eyes (bad karma) and not with their hearts (good karma); how people want big cars and televisions (bad) and don't live from their hearts (good). I was reflecting on his words as I walked home, thinking that people here have so little but are generous and happy.

Every so often I come across something that stops me in my tracks ...and I had one such moment this morning. I was walking along the pavement of the busy road on my way to get the bus to work. Shopkeepers were setting up their stalls and pavement sellers organizing their wares. Crouched on the ground was an old man with a small cloth spread out in front of him. To one side was a pile of white/purple garlic and some bright red and green chilies. He was meticulously organizing them to create a series of beautiful flowers spread evenly across the cloth. It's the little things.



### **English Club in Chitwan – A Fun Approach to Learning by Suzy Adams**

Every Friday in Chitwan, English Club is held at Sri Sathaya Sai Balashram - an all girls children home. The children who live there go to school during the day but live at the home either because they no longer have parents, or because their parents are unable to look after them. The English Club was set up with three aims in mind.

Firstly it was hoped the club would inspire the children to develop a passion for reading. Children who read in their spare time at home often attain higher grades at school. Without this club the children at the home would rarely get a chance to read story books. The children are split into groups according to ability, and each group gets a book to read together. This ranges from picture books with a few words in big print for the younger children, whereas challenging fiction is given to the more advanced readers.

Most groups have two or three children and one volunteer. The role of the volunteer is to help the children read the book rather than to read the book to the children. The aim is for the children to learn and gain confidence, so as the children read the story aloud, the volunteer helps with pronunciation of difficult words. They also ask questions about the characters along the way to make sure the children understand the words and are not just sounding out the letters. It's really obvious how much the children love reading the story books, and they often do not want to give them up when reading time ends.



Another goal of the English club is to help develop a creative streak within the children. The Nepali education system tends to focus on learning through rote, giving little time for children to learn how to think for themselves. The final activity of the session is designed to give the children the opportunity to work on these skills. Last week the children were asked to use the crayons and pencils provided by Projects Abroad to draw a princess and there were some very interesting results! Next week they will draw a castle and the following week a dragon and every week the child's creation will be stored in their personal portfolio. Once the three drawings are complete they will be helped to write a story about the princess, castle and dragon and we look forward to some creative stories.



English is a language of ever increasing importance in Nepal, with tourism now the largest industry. The club gives the children a chance to practice their English every week with people from all over the world. Some weeks there are four or five foreign nationalities represented, and this gives the children a chance to find out about other cultures.

The program last about two hours and is broken up by songs, games and snack time to help the children maintain concentration and create a fun atmosphere. Reading should be seen as something pleasurable, rather than a chore. The children's favorite song is probably 'Bananas Unite', which involves hand-gestures and dancing as well as singing. All the children and volunteers gather in a circle outside and do the activity altogether and it's a great fun atmosphere! Team games like Mr. Wolf and Telephone are also played outside and you can't help but notice how wide the children smile and jump for joy when their team wins!

Care volunteers are involved in planning and leading the English club and it wouldn't be possible without their enthusiasm. Regular volunteers are also able to help by joining in with games and songs and taking a group of children for the reading section and final activity. The club is enjoyed by volunteers, children and staff alike.

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### **Rice Planting in Nepal is Harder Than it Looks by Alex Court**

One of the nicest visas I've seen in Nepal is paddy fields. Terraced areas on the sides of hills that look a little like ponds. The rice plant grows submerged in water and the sprouts are a beautiful organic green. You've seen the posters sponsored by UNICEF which say 'rice is life' – meaning to encourage a healthy diet for children in developing countries. The green of the paddy fields in Nepal remind me of that phrase because the green is so alive.



But green is not the only color you routinely see when looking at paddy fields. You often see the mosaic of colors of the clothes worn by the women who are planting or harvesting the grains. They're often wearing deep reds and vibrant yellows – fantastic contrasts with the deep organic green of the crop. Whenever I've been in a bus travelling through Nepal's countryside these scenes always seem so serene. I'm in a comfy seat and all the colors I see out the window are fascinating and exciting but also calming.

I recently found out calming is the entirely wrong word. The work is back-breaking!!!

Along with 9 volunteers I went to a small village outside of Kathmandu to learn about this essential process. Around the end of June Nepalis celebrate the start of the monsoon by planting rice and we got to join in. The rain was coming down lightly and as we walked from the bus to the house we would leave our bags in the small paths were squelchy underfoot.

Before the seed could go in the ground we had to level the mud. This means transporting sodden mud from one side of the field to the other side. There was a rudimentary tractor doing some of the work but the rest had to be achieved with rakes and other hand-held tools. The mud is heavy and there's loads of it! This part of the process made me realize how strong the people who do it all day must be.

Then the planting had to be done. You take a small clump of the plants and they need to be inserted into the underwater mud in rows – two at a time. It sounds easy, but again it's not a task to be taken lightly. You're bent over straining your back and because I'm not so flexible, my ham-string muscles were screaming at me to stop. You need to plant the seedlings in a row so as not to waste the space – this land is the main source of income for the local people and you don't want to waste it. Staying focused when your body is telling you you're in the wrong position isn't easy. From time to time you need more seed. In an adjacent field a group of women were cutting the growing seeds, and





collecting them into bundles. When we ran out of planting material in our field you had to wade through the mud to the next field and collect it. Each time I went to see the other group of women they tried to give me something like 8 to 10 bundles – they found it hilarious when I dropped half of them under the weight. These women must have been in their 40s, 50s and 60s and the fact they can carry more than a 24 year old bloke seemed ridiculous to them. It wasn't my proudest moment.

After a couple of hours bent over in the mud, trying my best to concentrate on moving the mud to the right place or planting the seed in the right line I was exhausted! I left with a new appreciation of how hard these people work. Just how they can do it with a wide smile on their face is beyond my comprehension. It was a fun experience, and a great lesson to learn.

