

Week 2 started with an early bus ride to Kathmandu on Monday morning. Transit in Nepal is slow, even under the best of conditions. The drive to Kathmandu covers 120 miles on one of the main highways in Nepal, but it is a narrow, serpentine, and bumpy road that follows the Trishuli and Marsyangdi rivers. We covered 120 miles in just under 9 hours. We did stop for an hour to grab lunch at one of the roadside resorts that seem to appear out of nowhere. Ben and James spent 500 rupees to take a quick swim in the resort pool to cool off (it's a good story should you choose to ask them about it in the future). We arrived at our home for the week, the Kathmandu Guesthouse, around 3pm and quickly ventured into town to scope out our surroundings. The first thing you notice walking around Kathmandu is the air quality. The city ranks among the most polluted cities in the world and locals frequently walk around in surgical masks, a practice several of us adopted during the course of the week. Our hotel was located in the Thamel neighborhood of Kathmandu, which is a central location for tourists and trekkers. The streets surrounding it are lined with restaurants, bars, souvenir shops, and trekking shops selling goods of various quality. I would be surprised if there is a higher concentration of knock-off North Face, Patagonia, or Marmot anywhere in the world. Amidst all of that, we found plenty of other places we frequented throughout the week. Ben and James found a climbing gym within a short walk of the hotel where they climbed most days after clinic. There was also a yoga studio within walking distance and a gym that was equipped with free weights and a few treadmills and stationary bikes.



We had a wide variety of clinical experiences this week. Joining our Bicol team for the week were Dr. Arjun Shrestha, an ophthalmologist from Kathmandu, and Dr. Linda Sterna, a neurosurgeon from Florida who was an extremely successful fashion designer in NY (dressing the likes of the Jimi Hendrix and the Rolling Stones) before deciding to pursue a career in neurosurgery. Tuesday was our first clinical day in Kathmandu and we spent it at the Nepal Eye Foundation Hospital. We were given a tour of a facility that has been established to help provide assistance to deaf and blind children in Nepal. It provides rooms for around 20 children who each stay for several months to receive testing, training, and occupational therapy. It was exciting to see such a specialized facility in Nepal! We spent the rest of the morning shadowing physicians as they saw patients in clinic. The pace of patient visits at the clinic was quite incredible. Physicians rarely spent more than a few minutes with each patient, yet there was always a line of more patients waiting to be seen. In the afternoon, we shadowed Dr. Shrestha while he performed cataract surgeries. The cataract surgeries were incredible to see as patients who had been blind in one or both eyes for years had their vision restored after the 10-minute procedure!



The remainder of the week, students split up into groups of 3-4 students and had the opportunity to all shadow at Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital (the first teaching hospital and most advanced

hospital in Nepal) and two smaller private hospitals, Helping Hands Clinic and Green City Clinic. Dr. Sternau joined the groups that went to Tribhuvan each day which allowed students to round with the neurosurgery team in the morning and shadow neurosurgeries in the afternoon. Nearly everyone agreed that the day spent with the Neurosurgery department was one of the highlights of the trip! Because most Nepali hospitals are limited with regard to their ability to handle neurosurgical cases, many of these cases throughout the country are referred to Tribhuvan. Accordingly, when we visited Tribhuvan, we were able to round on cases we would rarely, if ever, see in the U.S. We



encountered multiple infants with meningocele or meningomyelocele, a woman with Pott's disease affecting her lumbar spine, and a patient recovering from removal of hydatid cysts. Other cases we rounded on included a patient with a Chiari type I malformation, an infant with Crouzon syndrome, and a woman recovering from removal of an arteriovenous malformation that had gone untreated for so long that it had grown from her brow ridge to fully occlude the orbit of her right eye.

On Wednesday, Clara and Scott were able to observe a neurosurgical procedure to clamp a ruptured aneurysm of the anterior cerebral artery. Throughout our time at Tribhuvan, we were all impressed with the surgeons, physicians, and residents. They were all extremely competent and eager to teach and answer any questions we had.

Our experiences at Helping Hands Hospital and Green City clinic were different from those at Tribhuvan. In general, the care was less patient-centered and treatment seemed to be largely about how many patients could be seen. In fairness, both hospitals were incredibly busy and the chaotic environment may have contributed to that impression. As might be expected at private hospitals, physicians and medical officers were much less eager to teach and there were times where we felt that we were in the way a little bit. It certainly depended on who you were shadowing that day, and some medical students had very positive experiences at both hospitals. One of the perks we had at Helping Hands was that we were able to pick the ward we shadowed in. This was different than at Tribhuvan where we all rounded with the neurosurgery team. There were opportunities to shadow physicians in emergency medicine, orthopedics, OBGYN, critical care, and internal medicine. So despite it not being the highlight of the Kathmandu portion of the trip, it was still a good learning experience, and everyone was able to tailor it to their interests.

We had Saturday off from clinic and spent the time exploring the city a little more. All 15 of us went out for lunch at OR2K Kathmandu, a Mediterranean place that had been recommended to us earlier in the week. The food was phenomenal! It



was definitely one of the best meals of the trip, and way the perfect start to the day's excursion. We attempted to burn off some of the lunch calories by walking over to Durbar Square, which houses the former royal palace and was heavily damaged in the 2015 earthquake. Four years later, the damage is still obvious, with some of the repairs appearing to be in their infancy. We hired a guide for \$10 each to give us a tour, with the group evenly split on whether he was legit or we were about to get swindled. Luckily, he was a fantastic guide and it was fascinating to learn a little bit more about the history of Nepal, hear our guides first-



hand account of the earthquake, and learn more about the ongoing repairs. Following the tour, we took a meandering route through the city back to the hotel before having one last dinner. There may have also been a small gathering of the group with a few Gorkhas (hands down, Nepal's best beer) and a couple of bottles of wine to bring the night and our time in Kathmandu to a close. Tomorrow, we're off to the mountain town of Bandipur!