


The challenge of care in the COVID crisis



Sitala Devi Sharma (left) is the pharmacist at Lalgadh Leprosy Hospital. She has lived on the hospital campus, with her family for the last 25 years. 'My responsibility is to manage the supply of essential medicines and to distribute medicines to the patients. Lockdown has made me even more sensitive, busy and responsible. Before the lockdown, 500 to 600 patients used to come daily. Nowadays, only about 30 to 40 people come ... Some patients come on foot, some by bicycles, some by motor bikes, some even come by reserving an ambulance ... It has become very difficult for the poor. Thankfully, the hospital where I work provides free services and medicines to the poor, the disabled, the handicapped, the leprosy patients and the affected people.'



As in so many countries, school attendance and exams stopped abruptly for all students because of COVID-19. Sisters Punam (left) and Neelam (right) photographed in late 2019, are waiting a return to school and rejoin their friends. The education of these two sisters has been sponsored by NLT Ireland since 2007. If you wish to find out more about our education support for young children, please do get in touch. Contact details are below.

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Nepal Leprosy Trust Ireland would like to thank all who support our work. If you would like more information on any item covered in this edition please contact us by email: info@nlt.ie or telephone: 086 2584367. Irish Registered Charity No 14810. CLG No 342733. Registered address: Killeline, Newcastle West, Limerick



Nepal Leprosy Trust News

Beating leprosy, breaking stigma and building lives

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The beautiful grounds of Lalgadh Leprosy Hospital and Services Centre' in south-eastern Nepal: for 24 years a haven of healing and hope for hundreds of thousands.

Protection and pressures in the face of COVID

Thanks to a generous Irish donation to our Infection Control funds, NLT Ireland has passed on €11,000 for personal protective equipment (PPE). This will equip staff at Lalgadh Leprosy Hospital and Services Centre as they work to care for patients during the COVID-19 crisis.

To date, Lalgadh Hospital has managed to obtain a small supply of PPE and has had to use it very judiciously. The hospital staff must work to secure their own supplies. Those at greatest risk - nurses, doctors, lab workers, cleaning staff and all others on the frontline - keep their own set, which they wash, sterilise and reuse. The hospital equipment may prove

inadequate for coping with many COVID cases as numbers rise in Nepal. There are two manual resuscitators (artificial manual breathing units), one heart and respiration monitor, and no ventilators. Despite such limited supplies and huge challenges, staff continue to care for others with their typical courage, resilience and faith.

Nepal's national lockdown has been extended until 2nd June. By 24th May there were 603 cases of COVID-19 and 3 deaths recorded nationally. Patient testing has been very limited so actual numbers are unknown.

A surge of virus cases may yet happen, or people may die in the community

God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. Hebrews 6:10



Lalgadh Leprosy Hospital medical staff prepare for an even busier schedule ahead

undiagnosed. In Lalgadh Village, beside the hospital, 1 case was diagnosed by 13th May.

Lalgadh Hospital has severely cut back normal hospital services. The usual outpatient number of approximately 600 per day has fallen to about 40 - 50 patients, mostly leprosy and other severely ill or emergency cases. Everyone entering the hospital compound is tested for fever to ascertain the likelihood of having the virus.

Funding for the hospital has been badly affected; resulting in a loss of more than €1,200 (150,000 Nepal Rupee) daily. While all leprosy patients are treated free of charge, income is generated from non-leprosy outpatients and diagnostic services. Meanwhile the inpatients services are fully operational, with about 70 inpatients in the wards, mostly those affected by leprosy,

including children.

Lalgadh Hospital Community Outreach Programme across Province 2, with its 6 million people, had been suspended since March due to government restrictions. The hospital has recently received government permission, despite the lockdown, to visit the villages to help support those in need of food and other emergency relief supplies.

This crisis is especially challenging for those with pre-existing medical conditions like leprosy and other diseases, those who are disabled, elderly, homeless or marginalised. The lockdown increases the risk of other epidemics such as hunger and malnutrition.

Province 2 has more than 2.5 million multidimensional poor people, representing 35% of all poor Nepalese according to the government's Multidimensional Poverty Index

report 2018. They work as farm labourers and are often paid in produce. As they can not work during the lockdown, the wage earner and the wider family members may experience hunger and struggle to survive.

A COVID-19 Emergency Relief Package has been developed by Lalgadh Hospital staff to provide food and other provisions to Self Help Groups and to Village Alive Programme groups.

There are 165 groups in total, with 3,881 members, who collectively work to improve their lives with support from the outreach teams. A dry ration package of rice, salt, lentils, oil and soap will be given to each group member. This will benefit all members directly, both male and female, and their extended families. It is estimated the supplies will provide for a family for between 20 to 30 days.

If you wish to support the food aid project in any way, get in touch with Vera at info@nlt.ie or donate via PayPal on our website at www.nlt.ie

Emergency COVID-19 preparations at Lalgadh Hospital



Fever desk; patients approach fearfully



Systematic cleaning and disinfecting

The Nepal Government has asked for Lalgadh Hospital's help in providing two COVID-19 related facilities:

- 10-bed quarantine unit – for isolating asymptomatic patients who have been in contact with COVID patients. 5 patients are in quarantine at the time of writing, May 2020. A 24-hour police guard ensures quarantined patients remain in isolation.
- 10-bed isolation unit for treating COVID-19 patients, recognising the risks to nearby

immune-deficient leprosy patients. 3 patients are in the Isolation Unit at present. They are being monitored and barrier-nursed.

Staff are working flat-out on extra infection control measures: systematically cleaning, disinfecting and fumigating the entire hospital; installing extra liquid soap and hand sanitizer dispensers; running education classes for the patients on hand-washing; and still trying to acquire more reliable stock of PPE for the protection of staff.