



Dental and Medical Camp Lumbhini 2009

For two weeks four blue banners hung at the crossroads in the centre of Lumbhini, birthplace of the Buddha, in Southern Nepal close to the Indian border. Their hand-painted lettering read;

'Rangjung Yeshe Shenpen, Free Dental and Medical Camp, 21st - 24th September, at the Korean Temple, Lumbhini'.

Like all hosts we wondered at first if anyone would come to the event we had spent weeks planning and days setting up. We needn't have worried! As the gates opened on 21st September it became clear that the dental and medical services being offered were meeting a real need for people from villages all over the district.

Twelve dentists from Singapore and Malaysia and two from Nepal got down to business at 7.30 am on one side of the huge verandah, in front of rooms holding suitcases of supplies and trailing wires to their drills. The three medical doctors and one nurse on the team from Singapore and Malaysia set up consulting tables and a pharmacy under the eaves on the verandah opposite. Thirty five volunteers from Kathmandu and Lumbhini held heads, hands and instruments, sterilised equipment, ferried patients back and forth, registered details, calmed nerves, and held back the crowds. Interpreters relayed information from local dialects into Nepali then into English and back, over and over again. That first day a comfortable 250 people arrived on foot for dental treatment and 350 to see the doctors.



Day two began with arrivals at six am. Men, women and children waited in the hot humid compound among the puddles from the downpour of the day before. Slowly the orderly lines were swelled with new arrivals hoping for a place in the shade of the registration hut or a seat on a bench on the wide verandahs, ever closer to the treatment areas. As more and more people arrived so did the local police to help with the good natured but firm crowd control. Monks dispensed water and biscuits tirelessly through out the day. I watched

one small boy, who had been waiting six hours to see a doctor for a foot wound, carefully pocket his biscuits (despite the longing look he gave as he put them away) to share with his younger brother waiting by the gate. We finished before sunset with everyone who had queued being seen in the end and all those who had been helping exhausted but exhilarated.

By lunchtime on day four the dentists had seen nearly a thousand hundred people for fillings and extractions and handed out hundreds of toothbrushes with advice on their use – and balloons! Many of our patients had not seen a dentist before - which may have accounted for the the need to constantly move on bystanders from the entertainment of watching an extraction.

The medical doctors saw an amazing two and a half thousand patients from babies of a month old to nonagenarians. There was a great deal of joint and back pain, digestive problems, skin complaints and infections. Four serious complaints were referred to the hospital in Bhaihawara.



Although the heat was intense, good humour remained intact – the result we suspect of the excellent food prepared three times a day by our monk-cooks and supplemented with ample and wonderful milk tea and biscuits!

Our very grateful thanks go all those people who made the camp a success, every one of them a vital part of the team.

All our medicines were donated by the Nepali Society (NRN Singapore). The

Lumbhini Development Trust and the local Lumbhini District police found us places to live and work. The Korean Temple hosted us with patience, allowing us to colonise vast areas for the event. Doctors, dentists and nurses took a week from their practices or gave up precious annual leave to join the camp. Overseas volunteers paid for their airfares and accommodation, as well as raising contributions from generous donors in Singapore and Malaysia to support their work here. Monks, nuns and lay volunteers gave their time and effort with generosity.

All in all everyone worked harmoniously together to make a reality of our motto

'compassion into action'.

