

Opportunity in disguise

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April 25, 2015 at 11:56 am: For centuries to go, this day will be remembered as a "Black Day" in the history of Nepal. The unseeable and probably unforgiveable movement of Indian and Tibetan plates beneath caused Nepal's land to be shaken with terrors. With Gorkha as epicenter on April 25, 2015; measuring 7.8 on Richter Scale, followed by three major aftershocks measuring 6.6R on April 25, 2015 (Gorkha), 6.9 R on April 26, 2015 (Sindhupalchowk) and 6.8R on May 12, 2015 (Dolakha/Sindhupalchowk) and thousands of aftershocks, killed over 8,850 innocent people. This cruelty of nature injured over 22,000 people with almost 900,000 houses destroyed rendering millions homeless and foodless. Spare the financial loss which is insurmountable.

On the very first day of this tragedy, I myself had a narrow escape from death. It was just a matter of seconds when the water tank from my 3 storied building fell just behind me. Horrified and motionless, it was my brother who took me to a safe open area. It was during the evening that I realized the gravity of the situation when I heard the news of deaths and injuries following earthquake that day.

Perhaps, it was the feeling for humanity and a pang of responsibility that led me to the nearest hospital from my home the next morning. Bhaktapur Hospital was in a total chaos with over-crowding of the injured and relatives of the deceased. With limited doctors and health professionals, any person related to medical profession was considered a boon. As soon as I presented my medical identity card, I was requested by the attending emergency doctor to assist me as a volunteer. From recording vitals to opening of intravenous line, I was given the duties of a doctor. Learning by observing what the seniors did was the only option for me.

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We were all busy with our works when another aftershock followed measuring 6.9R that day. We managed to treat patients in the ground in front of the emergency hall. Though I made minor mistakes during various medical procedures, I could alleviate the sufferings of many patients. I got an opportunity to learn many emergency procedures during the next three days under the guidance of seniors. Honestly speaking, it was emotionally challenging to me during my very first approach to the injured as I was never exposed to such real scenarios. How badly did I wish that my college prepare us for such disasters since the very first years of medical life! I could have been more efficient had I received any such training earlier.

On subsequent days, I managed to be part of a mobile medical team led by the US doctors when I visited Changunarayan and Pikhel of Bhaktapur. I acted as a translator and also recorded vitals in the camp. Wound infections following traumatic injuries, respiratory tract infections and water borne illnesses were noted as their major concerns. Community participation from making tents to arrangements of queue led us to run our camp efficiently. Ah, those ecstatic moments when people blessed us for our efforts!

Hunger prevailed in those areas where we had our camp. Hence, departing the medical teams to Sindhupalchowk, I stayed back in Bhaktapur where I had gathered the local youths to raise funds. Almost Nrs.30,000 was collected and relief materials were distributed effectively after a preliminary survey of necessity. With distribution of relief materials, I gave a demonstration of scientific hand washing methods among villagers along with the methods of water purification and importance of sanitation. It boosted up my confidence and mass communication skill.

Lastly, I was involved in a child project launched by AIESEC. It involved children in arts, crafts, games, singing, dancing to help them cope with the terrors of earthquake with play therapy, teach them the basic earthquake drill and counsel their parents about boosting their children

with positive vibes despite tremors of earthquake. Among all, it gave me a perception that children are the most vulnerable group for post traumatic stress disorders.

As a medical student, it was and is always my foremost duty to help the patients and serve them. This duty increases several folds during such calamities. I stretched myself to utmost limit and got once in life experience. It was infact an opportunity for me to learn many new things, though this opportunity was created by this

devastating incident. As our country lacks sufficient number of licensed doctors, every medical students should walk out of their comfort zones and help in what-so-ever stuffs they are compatible with. These disasters demand a unified and responsible move amongst all. It is always drops of water that makes an ocean. No small help is small. Hence, being in one of the highest regards of profession, it becomes our foremost responsibility to help people in whatever way we can, in whatever circumstances we are blessed with.