

A physiatrist at last!

From the core of my heart, I wanted to be a medical doctor and then a Rehabilitation/SCI Physician. The dream came true!!



Finally, I passed: five years training culminating in the degree of Doctor of Medicine (MD) in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation from Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, Dhaka, Bangladesh!! In our region, the Bangladeshi medical degree is considered to be the most highly recognized and toughest degree for the Nepalese for which I was always afraid! Fortunately, five years of hard work paid off and I cleared clinical examination in single attempt. To pursue medical degree from country like Bangladesh is really tough for the people with physical impairment like me but with a determined heart and the support of near and dear ones I managed to complete my MD in PM&R. I studied the medical care and rehabilitation of spinal cord injuries, stroke and brain injuries, amputation, pain, arthritis and musculoskeletal disorders and many physiatric interventions. At the same time, I had the chance to attend so many national and international conferences as a part of my training.

During this five years of training I was able to travel to other centres. In 2012 I joined the faculty of a workshop developing the Elearn-SCI program in New Delhi (see photo below), following the International Spinal Cord Society/Asian Spinal Cord Network conferences there in which I participated as faculty and presenter. Although I was in Dhaka during the great earthquake of April 2015 in Nepal, we brought a team back to Nepal within days to serve earthquake SCI victims at the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre (SIRC) with the support of the Vancouver-based SpiNepal group.

Later that year I was invited as an honorary clinical fellow in the department of rehabilitation medicine of the University of Melbourne and visited Austin health program of SCI care with the support of the Royal Melbourne Health Team. I was invited to be a speaker at the annual meeting of the International Society of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine (ISPRM) and also became task force committee member of rehabilitation disaster relief of ISPRM.

Last year I was given the first international award for international physiatrists by the Canadian Physiatrists' Research and Development Foundation, supporting me to attend the 9th Canadian Association of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Review Course at University of Toronto. I followed this with a training Observership in spinal cord injury medicine at GF Strong Rehabilitation Centre, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada and Lyndhurst SCI centre, Ontario, Canada. At the same time I met a lot of friends and families of the Vancouver-based SpiNepal group who have supported Sheela and me, so that we may return to my country to help the needy ones through ongoing development of quality medical/SCI rehabilitation.

I cannot even imagine this success without the support and guidance from SpiNepal group (led by Claire Weeks and Peter Wing), my teachers, my wife, BSMMU, SOS Children's Village, SIRC friends and families. Thank you so much for your ongoing supports. I also like to thank ASCoN families, the Canadian Association of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, my teachers and colleagues at the GF Strong Rehabilitation Centre as well as the Toronto Rehabilitation Institute and Lyndhurst SCI Centre, the Royal Melbourne Hospital teams, and the International Society of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation for supporting me.

Being the first and only physiatrist working in my home country (Nepal), I shall have both privileges and challenges. First, I will be working as the Medical Director at Spinal Injury Rehabilitation

Centre(SIRC) after my return, from where I can start my journey to establish quality rehabilitation services throughout the Nepal. Rehabilitation has been a low priority and even now is not an integral part of the health care system in Nepal. My priority will be to strengthen the quality of medical rehabilitation across the entire spectrum of care from emergency to reintegration into community and throughout the entire life of Nepalese SCI people. Beside this, I am determined to start MD residency training of PM&R and also training for allied rehabilitation professionals to fill the gap and improve the local capacity of optimum rehabilitation manpower. Other areas in my specialty like brain injury and stroke, amputation, pain, arthritis and sports injury also need comprehensive rehabilitation for which we need more rehabilitation professionals (possible if we can develop our own rehabilitation professionals). I will be working with ministry of health to develop comprehensive medical rehabilitation protocols/guidelines and implementation of UNCRPD and WHO guidelines. I will be continuing personal medical education to update my knowledge, and join a network of professionals, NGOs, INGOs, national and international institutions to develop quality rehabilitation services for Nepalese people.

To achieve this, we need a team work and ongoing support from national and international bodies, respect for and mutual trust of each other. Being very optimistic and determined to achieve this goal I look forward to ongoing support from SpiNepal to sustain quality SCI rehabilitation in Nepal.

Regards

Dr. Raju Dhakal, MBBS, MD(PM&R).

Picture taken in New Delhi at the time of the 2012 Elearn-SCI workshop; Raju slightly left of centre.

