

Pre-Monsoon (spring) 2012 Report

Volunteers

Dr David Evans
Dr Suzanne Hale
Dr Barney Fontaine
Dr Kitty Duncan
Laura Evans (medical student)



Brecon Training Weekend

A most rewarding weekend held at a rather attractive bunkhouse. The food was outstanding and provided a taste of things to come. We were joined by Jon Dallimore, who gave his view on the assessment and the management of diarrhoea. Also a talk on daily life at Machermo by Dr Shirley Gover gave many useful insights. There was an opportunity to practice the use of the PAC bag and savour the delights of entombment therein.

Lodging in Kathmandu

David stayed at the Kathmandu Guesthouse, which though \$40/night provided him with breakfast, and a lovely garden. Suzi stayed at the Student Guest House (500Ru/night), as this is where her and her family always stay while lodging in Kathmandu. The staff are always extremely friendly and helpful, and though the rooms are a little dark, they are clean and have hot showers for 500Ru/night. There is also a nice roof terrace. Dave moved to the Student Guesthouse in preparation for the early morning flight to Lukla, and they further accommodated us last minute when our flight was cancelled. Laura stayed there during the few days before her flight home.

Barney stayed in both the \$40 Kathmandu Guesthouse rooms and then moved to \$12 rooms where Laura initially stayed. There was very little difference apart from shared bathroom and no TV. He recommends Pilgrims guesthouse in northern Thamel, range of rooms and prices, good food, nice bunch from previous experience.

Preparations

Chhewang welcomed us to Nepal at the Student Guesthouse after allowing us a full day to settle into Kathmandu. He furnished us with Nepalese SIM cards, TIMMS cards and escorted us to the HRA office and CIWEC clinic for the teaching sessions. It was worth ensuring we had all the rupees we needed for our stay in the Khumbu, as there is only a cash point in Namche.

Meeting with Community Action Nepal

We met some of the members of CAN, including Murari Gautam the project manager. Maurari (mobile 9841340486) will be taking over from Ian in the role of liaising with IPPG.

Induction in Kathmandu

We were able to join the medial teaching which was being provided primarily for the Himalayan Rescue Association doctors. We found each talk extremely useful, and it was great to meet those who were providing the teaching as well as the HRA volunteers. Teaching included:

- Dentistry – by George Pollard. Including dental abscesses and avulsed teeth. We were taught how to provide dental blocks and the extraction of teeth.
- AMS, HAPE and HACE – by Buddha Basnyat. Buddha gave some useful advice about our altitude talks, and provided us with his email address and all of his telephone numbers should any of us need any help or advice. He emphasised that this included the IPPG team, which was appreciated.
- Diarrhoea, Fevers and Animal Bites in Travellers to Nepal by Prativa Pandey (Medical Director at CIWEC). We covered much ground giving us a firm foundation of treating these conditions within Nepal and the Nepali medical system.



Getting to Machermo

Our first flight to Lukla on March 6th was delayed by a few hours and we were later turned back due to high winds and excessive turbulence over the mountain passes. Following this we had greater sympathy for the requirement to cancel flights during poor weather, and felt extremely lucky when we successfully landed in Lukla the following day.

We made it up to Machermo in 6 and our route took us through Kunde where we were lucky enough to meet Dr. Kami. He gave us a warm welcome and showed us around the hospital. This gave us a good idea of what facilities were available and so who we might appropriately refer.

Day to day at the post

It was easy to settle into daily living at Machermo. At 7.30am, Kancha supplied us with a hearty breakfast and lots of tea and coffee. The weather was always best in the morning and we took it in turns to go on walks while the other(s) stayed behind to see any patients. There seemed to be no particular pattern in the arrival times of the patients. Those who were most sick tended to arrive in the evenings. Chhewang or Kancha always helped to translate for the Nepali patients, as our rudimentary attempts at the language never quite made it up to the standard required. Chhewang would also write down in Nepali how to take any tablets we had given to take away.

Bucket showers and laundry were also best performed in the mornings, and with the addition of a new solar cooker a few weeks into the season, we were furnished with water that often boiled in just under an hour. Kitty, who was used to a simple solar shower wash during a previous season found this particularly luxurious.



Lunch was provided at 12pm, and at 1pm we would do a round of the lodges in town to invite people to the afternoon talk, which we did at 3pm. The round of the lodges was often combined with a short walk up one of the two ridges either side Machermo to catch a bit of NCell signal and send a few messages. This normally lasted between thirty minutes and an hour, but was extended with the oxygen saturations challenge and answering peoples questions. We found that some people did get some free ‘mini consultations’ during this process, but conversely, it also helped

us to pick up on a few people who required a full review but probably would not have asked outright. After the talk, tea and biscuits are enjoyed.

Around 5pm the yak dung and wood stove is lit, and we normally ate dinner at about 6.30pm. We did tend to go to bed early, often to read, as it would be warmer in our sleeping bags than in the sunroom once the stove had died down.

Gokyo Clinic

We took it in weekly turns to run a clinic out of the Friendship Lodge in Gokyo, between April 3rd to 27th. Chhewang accompanied each person, who returned on the Sunday before the next person went up on Monday. We were not particularly busy up there but saw some of our more serious cases, including one case of HACE and one HAPE. We were given two rooms next to each other. Chhewang slept in the larger room which doubled as the clinic room, though it was often so cold in there that we tried to take the history upstairs in the warmer dining room first if it was empty. We came back to Machermo early on the last week because it was so quiet (and we missed Kancha's cooking!)



Reviewing Altitude Packs

We had a look out for the altitude packs in the lodges in Machermo and Gokyo. They all appeared well loved, and may need replacing in the next year or so. In some lodges they were tucked away with small collections of books and magazines, but we did see some people reading through them.

Altitude talk attendances

| Week of Trekking Season | Number of Trekkers Attending Altitude Talk |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Week 1 (13/03/12 – 18/03/12) | 41 |
| Week 2 (19/03/12 – 25/03/12) | 50 |
| Week 3 (26/03/12 – 01/04/12) | 115 |
| Week 3 (02/04/12 – 08/04/12) | 132 |
| Week 4 (09/04/12 – 15/04/12) | 110 |
| Week 5 (16/04/12 – 22/04/12) | 72 |
| Week 6 (23/04/12 – 29/04/12) | 112 |
| Week 7 (30/04/12 – 06/05/12) | 71 |
| Week 8 (07/04/12 – 13/05/12) | 36 |
| Total | 739 |

Sales

| Item for sale | Price | Number Sold |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------------|
| Alcohol hand Gel | 200Ru | 29 |
| Machermo Badges | 150Ru | 65 |
| Machermo T-shirts | 500Ru | 53 |
| Diamox | 10 US\$ | 24 |

Oxygen Saturations Challenge

During the course of the season, a total of 478 people performed the oxygen saturations challenge. People often donated far more than the requested 100 rupees, though a minority had their sats measured and did not return to pay later as they said they would (one couple looked a little startled when we bumped into them in Namche a week later). A number of people paid for their porters and guides to also partake in the challenge, which made for some nice comparisons, a little competition and more fundraising.

Medical Consultations

| Diagnosis | Trekkers | Porters and Guides | Locals | Total |
|--|-----------------|---------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| Altitude Related: | | | | |
| Mild AMS | 10 | 2 | 1 | 13 |
| Moderate AMS | 6 | 1 | 0 | 7 |
| Severe AMS | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| AMS + Gastroenteritis | 4 | 1 | 0 | 5 |
| AMS + Migraine | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| AMS + URTI/LRTI | 3 | 4 | 2 | 9 |
| HAPE | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| HACE | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| | | | | |
| Infections: | | | | |
| URTI | 2 | 7 | 13 | 22 |
| LRTI | 3 | 4 | 8 | 15 |
| Gastroenteritis | 8 | 2 | 2 | 12 |
| Pylonephritis | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Dental Abscess and URTI | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Dental Abscess | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Conjunctivitis | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| | | | | |
| Other: | | | | |
| Gastritis | 0 | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| Exacerbation Asthma | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| ? peritonitis | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Throat irritation | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Ankle pain & blister on toe | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Simple head injury | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Anxiety | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Headache – non AMS | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Mouth ulcer | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Tooth problems | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Non specific abdominal pain | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Visual field defect | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Fractured finger | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Hypertension | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Dog bite & mild stroke | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Musculoskeletal pain | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| Oral/pharyngeal thrush +/- gastroenteritis | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Total | 51 | 34 | 37 | 122 |

Machermo patient numbers

| Week of trekking season | Number of Patients | | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------|-------|
| | Trekkers | Porters and Guides | Locals | Total |
| Week 1 (13/03/12 – 18/03/12) | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Week 2 (19/03/12 – 25/03/12) | 2 | 2 | 0 | 4 |
| Week 3 (26/03/12 – 01/04/12) | 4 | 7 | 6 | 17 |
| Week 4 (02/04/12 – 08/04/12) | 7 | 6 | 5 | 18 |
| Week 5 (09/04/12 – 15/04/12) | 4 | 3 | 7 | 14 |
| Week 6 (16/04/12 – 22/04/12) | 7 | 8 | 5 | 20 |
| Week 7 (23/04/12 – 29/04/12) | 6 | 3 | 2 | 11 |
| Week 8 (30/04/12 – 06/05/12) | 6 | 0 | 5 | 11 |
| Week 9 (07/05/12 – 13/05/12) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Total | 37 | 30 | 32 | 99 |

Gokyo Patient Numbers

| Week of trekking season | Number of Patients | | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------|-------|
| | Trekkers | Porters and Guides | Locals | Total |
| Week 1 (03/04/12 – 08/04/12) | 6 | 0 | 2 | 8 |
| Week 2 (09/04/12 – 15/04/12) | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Week 3 (16/04/12 – 22/04/12) | 3 | 3 | 2 | 8 |
| Week 4 (23/04/12 – 27/04/12) | 2 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| Total | 14 | 5 | 5 | 24 |

Note: repeated consultations not included in the above figures.

Patient Evacuations

We had few emergency evacuations this season and required only two helicopters. These were for a patient with likely peritonitis and somebody with worsening AMS. We advised descent frequently, though this could normally be managed on-foot as symptoms improved. One patient with HAPE and his Spanish leader refused descent from Gokyo, and the doctor up there had to work hard with the PAC bag and buying oxygen from the Gokyo resort to get him through the night as safely as possible.

Times away from the post & walks

Dave's son visited Machermo during the season, before the two of them went on a whirlwind tour over the Cho La, round to Pheriche and back up the valley to Machermo, taking five days. Laura and Suzi took nine days to go over the Cho La, up to Everest Base camp where they were kindly accommodated by the Jagged Globe Team who had attended an altitude talk. They then went over the Kongma La to Chhukung, down to Pheriche to visit the HRA doctors, through Tengboche, Namche and Thame, and back over the Renjo La. Barney took a few days to walk with his uncle around Gokyo.



During our time in Machermo and Gokyo, we took it in turns to do morning and occasionally full day walks. We recommend walking up both ridges either side of Machermo, and also walking up the valley itself. In Gokyo it is possible to walk up to the Renjo La, up Gokyo Ri or to the fifth lake and back in a morning. Walking to the sixth lake at the base of Cho Oyu requires a full day. Walking around the Gokyo Lake itself takes roughly an hour and is a very pleasant walk when the snow has melted enough to permit it.

A few issues

- We were asked to send the out of stock medications to Kunde at the end of the season. However, Laura who had worked there for a week had had the pleasure of sorting out the out of date stock at the hospital to be thrown away. They are not in a position to use out of date medication.
- The KEEP office in Kathmandu has again moved. We found it at the end of the season, and there was not much going on when Barney and Dave looked around. Dave described the place as sleepy, and Barney went twice when it was open but nobody around to talk to, though he was able to go in and have a look around. It was closed throughout the strikes.
To find it now: Head out along Kantipath from Thamel towards the Garden of Dreams and the Royal Palace. Opposite Fire and Ice, and immediately after Java coffee, turn left (there is a KEEP sign here). Follow this road, and there are very clear signs along the way, explaining when to turn right to the office. Along this road is the, 'Garden Restaurant,' which was a lovely place to eat and still open during the strikes.

What to bring

- Small gloves and alcohol wipes
- More pegs – you will think there are plenty until the porters shelter opens, when they are all in constant use!
- A laptop does help, and does survive.
- Biro (no more pencils)
- Ground coffee from Kathmandu (IPPG supplies will not last the season). On that note, some sort of unbreakable caffetiere would be a welcome addition to the post. Hot chocolate too.
- A few more DVDs (there is a working TV and DVD player at the post).
- Take some “base-camp” type shoes which are warm and hardy enough, not to walk around the village but at least the front lawn (oh yes, we have a front lawn...its full of Yak shit but we do have a front lawn!)
- Wet wipes are not just for girls, they are also for men who don't always want to wash with ice cubes!
- You don't need adaptors, there are English type sockets and usually plenty of electricity from solar panels.

Ideas for the future

Sunglasses

Although we did not see any snow blindness at the clinic (Barney did see two cases unofficially in Gokyo Resort), we heard multiple reports from trekkers about porters and guides they had seen with snow-blindness going over the Cho La. We think this might be a good trial for the possibility of having emergency sunglasses for sale in the future.

Diamox Information Leaflet

If any future doctors are multilingual, we feel it would be of benefit if they could translate our diamox information leaflet into other languages common among trekkers coming through Machermo (including French, German, Spanish, Russian, Polish and Japanese).

Final thoughts

Whether like Laura you are on elective as a medical student, like Dave and Kitty who have made it to the top of their game (consultants) or whether at Suzi's and Barney's stage of your medical career, as SHO's taking a well earned break from e-portfolio's and mini-PATS...working for IPPG is a great opportunity to spend some constructive time, being extremely well looked after, in fantastically stunning surroundings! It can be treated as a steep learning curve in altitude (pardon the pun) and expedition medicine for those embarking on careers in the field, a new place to use your experience and pick up some new tricks, a good mix of expedition and general medical/community type medicine or even as an excuse to spend some time doing something worthwhile which you will also coincidentally love. There is a genuine need, a well established and smoothly running organisation, a great team and every excuse to go for it!



A few last tips:

- Think about whether pre or post-monsoon would suit you better. Post-monsoon generally a lot busier.
- Especially the pre-monsoon season can at times be quiet giving you a good amount of down-time when at least one of you has to stay at the post (the other can go on day walks etc). We all had our little “projects” to be getting on with during these times and although I would never have been left wanting for something to do, it is a good chance and efficient use of the little spare time medicine allows in your career to prepare for an exam, learn the guitar/a language etc.
- You don't necessarily need a guide or even porters really if you fancy doing the walk up on your own (Barney joined the team a week or two into the season as he was delayed by a stag do). The paths are well maintained, safe and obvious.
- Make a plan to do a trekking peak either before or after your stint at Machermo.
- Learn some Nepali language or at the very least, customs.
- No such thing as too much down!