Palpa Community Health and Development Project
United Mission Hospital – Nepal

Reporting period: August 2016
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Organization: Real Medicine Foundation Nepal (www.realmedicinefoundation.org)
Project title: United Mission Hospital; Palpa Community Health and Development Project
Project location: Palpa district, Nepal

August 2016
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On August 23, 2016, RMF team member Gaurav Pradhan, along with intern Larish Gautam, traveled 260 km west of Kathmandu to visit the United Mission Hospital in Tansen, in the district of Palpa. The purpose of our trip was to see the Community Health and Development Project in action. It took us 10 hours to reach Palpa; however, when road conditions are normal, it only takes 8-9 hours to reach the district. Once arrived, we met with Hospital Director Dr. Rachel Karrach, who introduced us to Community Health Chief, Sister Parbati Gautam and provided a short briefing about the Community Health and Development Project.

The Community Health and Development Project has been in operation since 1983, and all activities related to the project are currently managed by the Community Health Department (CHD), headed by Community Health Chief, Sister Parbati Gautam. Sister Parbati Gautam has been part of the Community Health and Development Project since its inception. The Community Health Department (CHD) is a separate department of the United Mission Hospital, which is working towards building community awareness and empowerment, strengthening local health facilities and facilitators in the community, and strengthening those involved in the provision of health services. The CHD was created, because in addition to providing health services to the local people of Tansen, the United Mission Hospital’s executive committee felt that it was essential to provide health services to an even larger population, as well as support government health posts operating in the district of Palpa. Hence, they established the Community Health Department (CHD), a separate department to actively work in collaboration with the Palpa district government and the United Mission Hospital.

Currently, the CHD is running 9 different programs in the Palpa district, which include the Town Clinic Program, Satellite Mother & Child Health Clinic Program, Child Nutrition Rehabilitation Center, Health Post Strengthening Program, Healthy Schools Program, HIV Awareness Program, Safer Motherhood Program, Gender/ Disability/ Disaster Rehabilitation Program, and the Swastiya Jiwan (Healthy Life) Radio Program. The Community Health Department (CHD) is currently funded by FELM (Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission). However, their funding has been decreasing over the past 3 years, and as a result CHD had to discontinue or reduce their coverage in most of their community programs.

Hospital Director Dr. Rachel Karrach approached RMF to request funding for 3 of the CHD’s programs:
- the Mother & Child Health Clinic (town clinic),
- Satellite Mother & Child Health Clinic Program, and
- the Child Nutrition and Rehabilitation Center.

Accordingly, during our stay in the district of Palpa, we visited the Town Clinic, Child Nutrition and Rehabilitation Center, and the Satellite MCH clinic to see them in action.
Mother & Child Health Clinic (Town Clinic)

On August 24, 2016, RMF’s team visited the Mother & Child Health Clinic (town clinic), which is located in the District Hospital in Tansen. The Mother & Child Health Clinic has been in operation for 42 years and is run in coordination with the Palpa District Health Office. The clinic houses four staff from the United Mission Hospital, including 2 Assistant Nurse Midwives (AMN), and 1 staff member employed by the District Hospital who is also an Assistant Nurse Midwife (AMN).

The Mother & Child Health Clinic is open from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM, 5 days a week, Sunday through Friday. The clinic provides free medical services, including antenatal care, postnatal care, health education and awareness, family planning counselling, immunization, and HIV testing for pregnant women and children under the age of 5. The Mother & Child Health Clinic sees an average of 20-30 patients each day, and on the day of RMF’s visit, the clinic received 11 patients for ANC visits and 14 for regular pediatric checkups. Most regular health services are available at the Mother & Child Health Clinic, whereas complicated and fatal cases are referred to the United Mission Hospital or Lumbini Teaching Medical College and Teaching Hospital, which is a private hospital in Tansen. The staff of the Mother & Child Health Clinic reports that most patients arrive for regular visits, and no complicated or fatal cases have been noted for the past 1-2 years. Also, no infant or maternal mortality cases were noted in the clinic during the past 1-2 years. The Mother & Child Health Clinic does see a few cases of borderline malnutrition, which are referred to the United Mission Hospital.

Due to its collaboration with the District Health Office, the United Mission Hospital has been able to build goodwill and excellent credibility in the Palpa district. The Mother & Child Health Clinic is visited not only by people from Palpa, but also from the neighboring districts of Kapilvastu, Baglung, and Syangja. There have even been cases of patients traveling to the Mother & Child Health Clinic from the Indian border.

Satellite Mother & Child Health (MCH) Clinic Program

The Satellite MCH Clinic Program has been in operation for 2 years in 2 VDCs of the Palpa district: Argali and Darlamdanda. Argali is located northwest of Tansen and Darlamdanda is located to the northeast of Tansen. These VDCs are each visited once a month by the United Mission Hospital staff. The dates are fixed for every month, and if there is a change in the dates, the local health post and all stakeholders are informed well in advance. The purpose of the Satellite MCH Clinic Program is to empower and strengthen local government health posts by providing orientation and training to health posts’ staff and also by providing much needed medical equipment so that women and children in outlying areas can access health services that would usually be available only in cities.
Argali VDC (Village Development Committee)

On August 24, 2016, RMF’s Gaurav Pradhan and intern Larish Gautam visited the Argali VDC with Community Health Chief, Sister Parbati Gautam. There were 6 staff members in the Argali government health post, including 2 Assistant Nurse Midwives. The staff member in charge of the health post was in Kathmandu for a month-long training session, so we met with the health post supervisor, Mr. Santosh Bhattacharai. Mr. Bhattacharai informed us that the number of antenatal and postnatal checkups has increased exponentially after the Satellite MCH Clinic Program began. Argali health post previously had no antenatal and postnatal checkups, but on average, 20 checkups were recorded during visits from the staff of United Mission Hospital. United Mission Hospital has earned a lot of goodwill in the region, and people trust the health services it provides. Some of the Argali health post staff are also occasionally invited to the hospital for on-the-job training. More serious cases are referred to hospitals in the city and the diagnosis from the hospital is sent back to the health post. The health post staff then compares the hospital diagnosis to that of their initial analysis. The health post supervisor said that by exchanging diagnoses, confidence in the health post is growing gradually. As per the Argali health post staff, no serious cases were noted during the past 2-3 years, and only general cases are seen. On the day of our visit, there were 14 antenatal checkups and 32 pediatric checkups.
Darlamdanda VDC (Village Development Committee)
On August 25, 2016, we visited Darlamdanda VDC with Sister Parbati Gautam. There were 4 staff members at the Darlamdanda health post, including 1 Assistant Nurse Midwife. We spoke with Mr. Reshmi Raj Neupane, who is in charge of the Darlamdanda health post, and he informed us that the number of antenatal and postnatal checkups has increased since the arrival of United Mission Hospital’s staff. The infrastructure of this health post was not up to the standard of the health post in Argali. However, there were no major cases in this health post; people in the Palpa district seem to be aware of the availability and importance of health services. Mr. Neupane further explained that there are no recorded cases of home births in the Palpa district. All births take place in the presence of a Skilled Birth Attendant. Mr. Neupane also said that the United Mission Hospital played a major role in increasing maternal and child health awareness in Palpa through programs like the Satellite MCH Clinic Program.

At both the Argali and Darlamdanda health posts, there are no cases of infant or maternal mortality on record according to those in charge. There are cases of borderline malnutrition, but no severe malnutrition cases are noted. The people living in the Palpa district are well aware of maternal and child health services provided by the hospitals, especially United Mission Hospital.

Child Nutrition and Rehabilitation Center
On August 24, 2016, we visited the Child Nutrition and Rehabilitation Center (CNRC), which is located on the outskirts of Tansen. The CNRC was established 10 years ago to look after malnourished children in a friendly and homelike environment. The center is built like a normal village home and has its own kitchen and garden. It can house up to 6 children and their mothers. As per Sister Parbati, the center is designed to make the mothers and
children feel comfortable, almost as if they were at home. Sister Parbati explained that providing nutrition education to mothers in a hospital environment did not prove fruitful, since the mothers did not follow what was learned after they had left the hospital.

The Child Nutrition and Rehabilitation Center (CNRC) has three staff members: 1 Assistant Nurse Midwife, Mrs. Bimal Thapa Chhetri, and 2 guards. On the day of our visit, there were no children staying in the CNRC. Sister Parbati informed us that the center had discharged a girl just 2 days before, and another patient had not been admitted yet. Sister Parbati further advised that there have been very few serious cases of malnutrition during the past 2-3 years. Most cases are borderline malnutrition, and the children are admitted to the CNRC for two weeks to one month. These cases are referred from the United Mission Hospital, the Mother & Child Health Clinic (town clinic), and local health posts. According to the admission register, there were a total of 459 children admitted to date and 14 admissions since February 2016. Sister Parbati told us about Shova Kumal, a 13-month-old girl, who was admitted to the CNRC 2 months ago, suffering from serious malnutrition. However, the young girl had to be transferred to the United Mission Hospital due to the seriousness of her condition. Shova Kumal passed away at the hospital the day after she arrived.

The Child Nutrition and Rehabilitation Center (CNRC) charges NPR 20 per day, and families who cannot afford this fee are housed at the CNRC for free. The CNRC also provides food and training to the mothers and children. Training includes preparing nutritious food, family health, and hygiene. Mothers are to follow an outlined daily while at the CNRC, and at the time of discharge, mothers are given a certificate for their training.
The people living in Palpa district seem to be well aware of the importance of mother and child health and the quality and availability of health services provided by United Mission Hospital. The hospital has been able to generate goodwill throughout the district due to the Community Health and Development Project. People flock to the free health programs and training sessions organized by the United Mission Hospital. Hospital Director Dr. Rachel Karrach has requested RMF’s support for administrative expenses of the above 3 programs organized by the Community Health Department (CHD).

*Daily activities for mothers in CNRC*