

P-B ROTARY IS PREVENTING HEARING LOSS AMONG NEPALESE CHILDREN

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A year ago, Ed Edmundson, who had just joined the Rotary Club of Potomac-Bethesda, announced that we would not see him for the next several weeks because he would be traveling on business to Kathmandu, Nepal. We asked him to attend a meeting of one of the four Rotary Clubs in Kathmandu to try to identify a humanitarian project in which our Club could participate.

A few days later, Ed attended a breakfast meeting of the Rotary Club of Kathmandu Midtown. The speaker that morning was Dr. Milan Maharjan, the Chairperson of Ear Care Nepal (ECN), a charitable organization she founded to fulfill her dream of helping underprivileged Nepalese school-age children who suffer from hearing problems. Dr. Maharjan is an ear, nose, and throat (ENT) surgeon who, in mid-2013, gave up her salaried position as an Assistant Professor at Kathmandu Medical College to found ECN.

ECN is a charitable organization that (1) provides education to children, mothers, teachers, and guardians, on issues related to prevention of hearing loss; (2) screens school-age children for hearing disabilities in both public and Buddhist monastic schools; and (3) provides surgeries for young people who suffer from correctible middle ear dysfunctions but whose families cannot afford to pay for such medical interventions. The four ENT surgeons and other team members who on a part-time basis provide their services through

ECN receive no remuneration for these acts of kindness.

According to various sources, including the World Health Organization (2012), the incidence of disabling hearing loss is highest in South Asia, as contrasted with in other parts of the world. A survey in Nepal in 1991 and later anecdotal information indicates that the level of deafness in Nepal is higher than in most, if not all, South Asian countries.

From August 2013 through the end of 2014, ECN screened approximately 8,000 economically disadvantaged children and performed over 100 middle ear surgeries on candidates it



had screened. For the most part, the candidates attended schools in or not far from Kathmandu. These surgeries were performed in a hospital in Kathmandu. ECN has also provided ear care education to thousands of people.

In Spring 2015, the Potomac-Bethesda Rotary Club pursued and obtained two District 7620 Future Vision Grants. In early summer, we wire-transferred \$3,700, including \$1,125 from the District, to the Rotary Club of Kathmandu Midtown. That Club agreed to administer these funds on our behalf. The funds were

used to pay the out-of-pocket costs for 30 middle ear surgeries performed by ECN – at a very modest cost per surgery. By late November, all of these surgeries were completed. With our Club's permission, ECN spent approximately \$400 in remaining funds in December to offset the costs of transportation to and from an "ear screening camp" ECN held in the Solukhumbu District of Nepal, close to Mt. Everest.

Building on this experience and the good working relationships established in 2015 between the two Rotary Clubs and ECN, the Potomac-Bethesda Rotary Club is now pursuing a Global Grant to pay in 2016-2017 for the screening of 5,000 high school students; 100 additional middle ear surgeries; purchases of medical tools and equipment; increased outreach efforts involving ear care education; provision of a "Community Ear Assistant" for one year to aid in the ear screenings and surgeries; and equipment maintenance for four years after manufacturer warranties expire.

The envisioned medical equipment includes an operating microscope, which can be used in the performance of field surgeries, rather than surgeries in a hospital setting; an impedance meter to enhance ECN's diagnostic capabilities; two sets of microsurgical instruments; and a portable, battery-operated audiometer. The latter piece of equipment should be quite useful. Power outages in Nepal occur on many days of the year and often last up to sixteen hours per day.