

Nuclear Medicine in Nepal and the 22nd All Nepal Medical Conference

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The Nepal Medical Association (NMA) is the largest professional organization of medical doctors in Nepal. The association started with 20 founder members, several decades ago. To-day it has grown into about 2000 life members and 11 branches in the country. The majority of doctors in Nepal are members of this association, including the doctors belonging to the specialty of nuclear medicine. The NMA organised its 22nd Annual Conference from 2-4 March, 2005 in the bustling Capital City of the country, Kathmandu. The theme of this year's conference "Health, Human Rights and Conflict" was very much appropriate in the national context, which in fact offered an opportunity and challenge to the medical professionals of Nepal to develop the national health care system in the country for providing quality health care to the people of Nepal (Figure 1).

It is very interesting to see that for a small country, both with regard to its geographical dimension as well as population, Nepal boasts of a staggering 11 Medical Colleges. Despite its large number of medical colleges, which are mostly run by private trusts or organizations and primarily catering to foreign students, the health service in the country is still far behind the necessary quality. Understandably Nuclear

Medicine has a lower priority in the scheme of things with regard to Government policies and implementation of health care facilities in the country.

Nuclear Medicine in Nepal:

Several years ago, 1985 to be precise, the Government of Nepal with generous aid from the Government of India started its first nuclear medicine facility at Bir Hospital, Kathmandu. Nuclear medicine professionals from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, headed by Prof. A.K. Basu were responsible for running the facility (consisting of a Siemens Orbitor Single Head SPECT system, thyroid uptake system, a rectilinear scanner and several other equipment, a basic radiopharmacy facility etc). In fact Prof. A.K. Basu, regarded as the initiator of Nuclear Medicine in Nepal, continued to work and develop nuclear medicine in Nepal for several years after his retirement from the AIIMS. Unfortunately the facility at Bir Hospital has never been upgraded any time after its inception in 1985 due to paucity of funds, and to-day the facility is almost non-functional.

A few years ago a native Nepali Doctor, Dr. Ramakrishna Shrestha (Figure 2), who was initially working at the Bir Hospital, took the initiative to start a new nuclear medicine



Figure 1 Dignitaries on the stage during the inaugural ceremony of 22 All Nepal Medical Conference



Figure 4 Dr. Shrestha with his Technologist, Mr. Manis

department in a private radiology set-up, called the "Metro Radiology and Imaging (MRI)" Institute. To-day this is the only functioning nuclear medicine unit in the country. The institute has installed recently a new Siemens e-cam Single Head SPECT system (Figure 3). The set up is being run by a capable team of professionals consisting of a nuclear medicine specialist (Dr. R.K. Shrestha), a qualified technologist (Mr. Manis), trained and educated in Australia (Figure 4) and a qualified Medical Physicist. The department is now planning to start radionuclide therapy.

I was invited by Dr. Shrestha to visit Nepal to participate in the 22nd Annual Convention of Nepal Medical Association, to deliver a plenary lecture and to conduct a few seminars covering various topics in nuclear medicine with the sole aim of creating awareness among the end-users of nuclear medicine procedures in Nepal.

During the week Dr. Shrestha made great efforts to bring together a number of his clinical colleagues belonging to various clinical specialties (Nephrology, Oncology, Cardiology, Orthopaedics etc) from different parts of Nepal to participate in two interesting seminars in nuclear medicine: One covering general nuclear medicine and the other covering specifically nuclear oncology. Both the seminars were held in the convention centre of Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu (Figure 5). Both the seminars were well attended by senior medical professionals, which generated a lot of discussions and helped the Metro Radiology and Imaging Institute to promote nuclear medicine in Nepal.

Personally and professionally it was a great experience for me. This Nepal initiative was completely my own and carried out using my own meagre resources, just to help our friends in Nepal, to consolidate their work and practice in Nuclear Medicine. Nepal is one of the least developed countries of the world. It needs help and encouragement to develop its nuclear medicine infrastructure. Through this column I would like to appeal to the International Community to come forward to help this small but one of the most beautiful countries in the world, to develop its nuclear medicine infrastructure, which may help its Government to improve its health care system and millions of its poor but deserving people access to better and modern medical care. The help may be in the form of donating new

or refurbished (but functioning) gamma cameras and SPECT systems or other equipment, supporting the training of professionals (doctors, technologists etc) abroad or even visiting the country to deliver a few lectures or organizing workshops or seminars. So next year, if you have not yet decided - where to spend your vacation, Nepal may be your destination. You may blend your vacation in Nepal with a few days of professional work at Bir Hospital or Metro Radiology and Imaging Institute. Try this - you will never regret.



Figure 2 Dr. R.K. Shrestha, Nuclear Medicine Consultant In-Charge of the Nuclear Medicine facility in Metro Radiology and Imaging Institution, Kathmandu



Figure 3 Dr. Shrestha with his Physicist colleague standing in front of their new SPECT Camera.



Figure 5 Prof. A.K. Padhi delivering a lecture at one of the several seminars in nuclear medicine organised during the week.