

Our first week in Nepal was eventful to say the least. We all booked flights out of NYC and left early Saturday morning. James and Clara arrived in Kathmandu Sunday night as scheduled, while Ben and Scott had their connection from Doha to Kathmandu cancelled Sunday morning. Qatar Airlines made up



**The Bicol Foundation Team for 2019**

for the cancellation by putting them up in a 5-star hotel for the evening and getting them on a 2am flight later that night. They used the time in between flights to go out and explore Doha, a unique city with rich culture and awe inspiring architecture. Their flight to Kathmandu arrived around 11 am on Monday and they quickly got in a group van for the long drive to Pokhara where they met up with James and Clara and the rest of the Bicol Clinic team who had arrived earlier in the day. The team consists of Dr. Mitchell Schuster (founder of the Bicol organization), Sushil Adhikari (Nepal's best pharmacist and dancer), 15 medical students (4 from Colorado, 9 from Tulane, 2 from Florida Atlantic, and 1 from Burrell College), and

3 Nepali translators. We were also joined by a fantastic ophthalmologist, Dr. Arjun Shrestha, for our time in Pokhara (and Kathmandu).

Pokhara is the second largest city in Nepal and sits on the shore of Lake Phewa in the shadow of Machapuchare, Annapurna I-IV, and Dhaulagiri, some of the highest peaks in the Himalayas. It provides for stunning scenery. June is the beginning of the rainy season in Nepal, but we were lucky enough to have clear skies on a few occasions during the week. Our home for the week was the Silver Oaks motel which has simple rooms and an amazing staff. They also had solid buffets for breakfast and dinner each day that kept us well fed for the week. Dinner buffets usually included chicken/vegetable curry, pasta, potatoes, naan, and occasionally momos (Nepali steamed dumplings served with a delicious spicy dipping sauce).



**Mt. Machapuchare**

We spent most of the week volunteering at the G.P. Koirala National Center for Respiratory Diseases near the town of Khairenitar about an hour van ride southeast of Pokhara. The region is quite poor and the clinic sees 100-200 patients each day. It's a fairly simple building with 3-4 exam rooms, an ultrasound machine, an X-Ray machine, a small pharmacy, and a lab for blood draws/analysis. We would arrive at clinic around 9:30 each day and work until about 4. We set up in two of the exam rooms and also set up a triage area to handle the increased patient load the clinic saw due to advertising that an American team was visiting. The 15 of us students divided into small groups and rotated on a daily basis through triage, H&P, ultrasound/ophthalmology, the phlebotomy lab, and the pharmacy. Many of the patients we saw this week were middle aged or older adults and had often worked for many years as day laborers. Chief complaints often related to joint pain and previous physical trauma associated with their work. The Bicol team brought a variety of supplies and medicines that could be given to patients who lacked insurance or who could not afford



**G.P. Koirala National Center for Respiratory Diseases**

treatment. Joint pain was treated with NSAID/steroid injections the team had brought if necessary. James and other students who had the chance to work with Dr. Schuster learned how to perform joint injections of the spine and knee. We also saw a lot of hypertension, diabetes, and gastrointestinal illness throughout the week. Some of the other more notable cases were an older gentleman with rheumatic heart disease who presented with systolic and diastolic heart murmurs and an abnormal ECG, a patient with koilonychias “spoon nails” due to iron-deficient anemia, a patient with scabies, and a 9 year-old male with progressive lower limb weakness and a positive Gower sign who was referred to Kathmandu for testing for Duchenne muscular dystrophy.

We had the day off on Saturday (the clinic runs Sunday-Friday) and went to a local orphanage where we donated several bags of school supplies and toys for the 13 children that live there. The Bicol Foundation also donated food for the orphanage, a number of ceiling



fans, and funds to cover the cost of school for each of the children. We also found time to relax on our day off. We took a trip to the World Peace Pagoda, the Buddhist stupa that sits atop one of the mountains

that surrounds Lake Phewa and were lucky enough to have a clear day. The views from the top were amazing! And we all enjoyed the afternoon off as well. Clara and a group of other students took the scenic route from the stupa and hiked down from the top and then canoed back to Pokhara. Ben and James found time to go paragliding and Scott kayaked on Lake Phewa. After one more half day in clinic, we departed from Pokhara and headed back to Kathmandu to spend a week at Tribhuvan Teaching Hospital. All in all, it's been a great start to the trip and we're all looking forward to the next part of the adventure!

