

PATAN ACADEMY OF HEALTH SCIENCES (PAHS) PROJECT SUMMARY

Despite an unprecedented expansion in the number of health care institutions and medical schools in Nepal, the health care needs of the rural population remain unmet and neglected. This is evidenced by the disparity in health indices between populations living in rural and urban Nepal. For example, the Infant Mortality Rate per 1000 births, which is an accepted indicator of a community's health status, is 132 in rural and mountainous Nepal, compared to 60 in urban Nepal.

One of the main reasons for this health disparity is the relative inability of the health care system to provide basic care in rural Nepal. A fundamental cause of this is the unwillingness of health care professionals to work in rural communities. Remote areas of Nepal have one doctor for every 150 000 people, compared to one for every 850 people in the Kathmandu area. This problem is compounded by the increasing trend of migration of doctors and nurses abroad. Currently, between 40 and 50% of medical students in Nepal are not Nepali, and return to their own countries after graduation.

Health care services in rural Nepal will not be adequate without sufficient deployment and retention of well-trained and motivated health care personnel, which is unlikely to happen without fundamental changes in Nepal's medical education system.

It is in this context that we propose to establish the Patan Academy of Health Sciences (PAHS), which will be an autonomous, not-for-profit, self-sustaining institution of higher education dedicated to improving the health status of the people of Nepal, especially those who are underprivileged and living in remote or rural areas. In contrast to current medical education in Nepal, PAHS will employ innovative strategies in the areas of student selection, curriculum design, locations for clinical training, teaching methodology and assessment, and faculty recruitment and retention. For example, to inspire graduates to provide health care in remote areas of Nepal, PAHS will enroll students of rural origin who preferably have experience as paramedics, train them in a curriculum that focuses on community medicine and the values of service and altruism, expose them to rural health care institutions, and provide them with needed infrastructural, technical and moral support while they are posted in rural areas.

Needless to say, this is an ambitious project. However, with adequate support, we can translate this vision into reality. We are currently in need of:

- Equipment for all of the basic science laboratories;
- Books as well as digital resources for a library;
- Funds to build classrooms, laboratories, and the library;
- Volunteer faculty to teach basic sciences;
- Scholarships to enable underprivileged students from rural areas, particularly female students, to attend PAHS.

Even in a country as poor as Nepal, it is critical that health care providers are given a strong foundation in modern medicine. The abilities and values that the Patan Academy of Health Sciences will instill in its students will motivate and enable them to become health care providers in the challenging setting of rural Nepal, as well as to become Nepal's future health care leaders.