

HearingNEPAL By Lew Tuck

Visits Ranchen Nunnery



A Tsum Valley woman rejoices after regaining her hearing with Dr. Ven. Thupten Dolkar. Black Bear and Rachel Bear wear khatas individually blessed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and have become popular mascots for HearingNEPAL, June 2010.

The HearingNEPAL program began in 2009 during the November course at Kopan Monastery as a karma yoga exercise, inspired by the indelible words of Khensur Rinpoche Lama Lhundrup, former abbot of the monastery: “It would be beneficial if you could take your [hearing health] program to Tsum Valley and Solu Khumbu. You must benefit all sentient beings, using your Medicine Buddha and Heart Sutra practice for pure motivation and freedom from obstacles.” Since then, Lew Tuck has taken HearingNEPAL to Kopan Monastery, Tawal, Tsum Valley, Solu Khumbu and Sera Je Monastery, providing hearing diagnosis and treatment to hundreds of people otherwise unable to access care.

HearingNEPAL brings preventative primary ear care and education to as many people as possible, especially in remote villages, schools and monasteries. For those in remote areas where the voice is the *only* form of communication, hearing loss dramatically affects a person’s quality of life.

In June 2011, Sue Tuck, Keshab Dangol – our local expert ear technician from the Nepal Association of the Hard of Hearing, our associated clinic near Kathmandu – Ven. Dhargye from Kopan Monastery Medicine Buddha Clinic, and I made a follow-up visit by helicopter to Ranchen Nunnery in Tsum Valley, now under the care of Kopan Monastery.

We were warmly greeted by manager Ven. Tenzin Lhondup, teachers and other nuns, and quickly began setting up the clinic: primary ear care section, video otoscope, ENT-style ear wax removal and ear syringe equipment, and a suitcase full of lotions and potions for ear health management. Fifteen new clients, who had walked for two days, were waiting patiently. Ears were checked for impacted wax or foreign bodies and hearing levels screened. Further treatment included cleanings, medication administration, primary ear care education, medical specialist referral, hearing aid fittings and reviews of the hearing aid settings of last year’s clients.

Hearing loss makes a particularly negative impact on younger people, who may be unable to develop normal speech, benefit from schooling and develop socially. One young man said they “hated” him in his village because he could not hear correctly.

So it is no surprise when, with a new hearing aid, a 21-year-old woman was moved to tears because she could start to seek some normality with her family and friends, or, when another young man, with renewed hearing, joyfully announced that he would be able to get married.

This year, Keshab trained the local Tibetan doctor, Dr. Ven. Thupten Dolkar, in primary ear care and hearing aid maintenance. We were able to leave batteries, Western medicines and equipment with her for use throughout the year.

Next year we plan to trek five days down from Ranchen Nunnery to Arughat in order to run a two-day “ear camp.” Here there is a school where we will have access to more children. We will also follow up new fittings made this year and track those fitted last year who were unable to make the two-day trip up to the nunnery. ♦

At the end of 2011, HearingNEPAL will visit Solu Khumbu, Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s native region. In 2012, HearingNEPAL will visit Sera Je Monastery in order to train local health workers in primary ear care, check 1,000 little monks’ ears, and fit or follow up on hearing aids for as many as possible. You can support HearingNEPAL’s work by visiting: <http://hearingnepal.org>