

International Nepal Fellowship – the work of Doctor Shirley Heywood

I would like to nominate the work of my sister, Dr Shirley Heywood – who works as a gynaecologist in Surkhet in mid-west Nepal with INF (International Nepal Fellowship).

At the age of 16 my sister read a prayer letter about women in Nepal who, due to lack of proper medication facilities, were living with obstetric fistula, one of the most serious and tragic childbirth injuries, which creates a hole between the birth canal and bladder and/or rectum. It leaves women and girls leaking urine, faeces or both, and often leads to chronic medical problems. Shirley remembers God's call on her life as she read this letter and although she hated the sight of blood, she made a promise to God that she would go. It took her 30 years to get to Nepal but in that time, God totally equipped her for the task. Firstly, she trained to be a doctor here and in Ethiopia and then gained experience, working for various aid agencies in Pakistan and then training student doctors in Papua New Guinea. She finally went to Nepal 20 years ago with International Nepal Fellowship. In the last 20 years she has been healing women, not unlike the woman who touched Jesus' cloak. This woman had been bleeding for 12 years. Shirley has treated some women who have been leaking for 30 – 40 years. Not only does she give them back their dignity after so many years of shame but in this primarily Hindu/Buddhist country, many of these women are becoming Christians due to the love and care they receive from my sister and her team.

A few years ago, Shirley raised the funds to build a dedicated hospital for fistula treatment where local doctors could be trained. So today, there is a 17-bed Fistula Centre in Surkhet, which can treat up to 300 women every year. Shirley has never married and so has never had children of her own, she has dedicated her whole working life to her calling, and I find it so moving that in Surkhet, she is known as "Aama" which means mother.

Now Shirley's focus is on prevention as well as cure. Last week, on 8th Sept, Shirley was presented with an award from the Nepali government for services to safe motherhood. She believes that Nepal's communities can work to ensure safe delivery and safe motherhood, to prevent women from fistula. This is her dream and from her side she will work for it as long as she can. Shirley's work is dependent on her fundraising through friends and churches which is why I have nominated her for our harvest donations.



Jackie Mouradian