“We are still pretty much in shock”

An interview with Dr Sushil Koirala, Editor-in-Chief of cosmetic dentistry

Dr Sushil Koirala: The situation in Kathmandu still remains very difficult owing to the extensive damage to many public buildings, government offices and schools. Nearly 7,500 lives have been lost and 14,500 people have been injured. Those who survived the earthquake are traumatised.

While physically my family and I are fine, we are still pretty much in shock. My children are very distressed because they were alone at home during the first episode of the earthquake. Some of my staff from the hospitals and clinics lost their houses unfortunately and had to stay with relatives for some time.

In one of the worst earthquakes in over 80 years, more than 10,000 people are believed to have died in the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal. Living in and practising dentistry in the capital of Kathmandu, Dr Sushil Koirala, Editor-in-Chief of cosmetic dentistry, has been directly affected by the disaster. Dental Tribune International had the opportunity to talk to him briefly about the situation in the country and how the international community can help it to overcome the humanitarian crisis.

Dental Tribune International: The earthquake on 25 April had a devastating effect on your country’s infrastructure and its people. What is the situation currently in Kathmandu, and how have you been affected personally?
Have you heard from colleagues in other parts of the country, and if so what is their situation?

Most of my dental colleagues are unharmed, but many of them are facing problems with their damaged clinics. Most of the dental hospitals in Kathmandu remained closed for several weeks owing to the damage and employees not being able to work because they are busy rebuilding their lives. Various agencies have estimated that more than eight million people across 39 of the country’s 75 districts have been affected by the earthquake. The most severely affected areas include the Bhaktapur, Dhading, Dolakha, Kathmandu, Kavre, Lalitpur, Nuwakot, Ramechhap, Rasuwa, and Sindhupalchowk districts of Nepal’s Central Region, as well as the Gorkha District of its Western Region.

Have you received any correspondence from the dental community?

I am glad to have received many e-mails with best wishes and prayers from our dental friends around the world. It is so gratifying to know that many of them have pledged their support of the earthquake victims of Nepal. Some dental manufacturers have shown keen interest to help us in the rehabilitation of children who have been affected.

Despite an immediate response from India and Western countries, relief efforts seem to be insufficient, according to reports. What is your impression?

International communities have offered immediate support and we really appreciate their help. However, 39 of the most affected villages are in remote locations with mountainous terrain. The relief work, therefore, is hampered and support items cannot be delivered on time. Many people in these small villages were waiting for basic items, such as food and shelter.

Regardless of the efforts by the Nepalese army, police and Red Cross Society, as well as national and international organisations, which were working 24/7, the manpower and supplies were still inadequate.

In your opinion, how will this disaster affect the infrastructure of your country in the long run?

Nepal's development budget depends mainly on foreign aid. Rebuilding all the infrastructure affected by the earthquake will require an estimated US$200 billion. The government plans to meet this mainly through foreign and international funding. However, damaged infrastructure will definitely affect the economic growth of Nepal negatively.

When I will be able to start practising again depends on when all my staff are mentally ready for work. Daily life in Kathmandu is still very stressful, as there are frequent aftershocks and people were still terrified. Under these conditions, I do not expect people will come for general dental treatment, except in the case of an emergency.

What do you consider the most important to improve your situation, and how can the international dental community help?

More than 95 per cent of houses and infrastructure have been damaged in the affected villages, so the rehabilitation phase for the earthquake victims is going to be a great challenge for our country. I personally feel that in order to overcome this difficult time our country needs support from each individual and professional in Nepal. We have, therefore, started a humanitarian project, the Dental Community for Humanity—Nepal Earthquake Relief Project, under the umbrella of the Punyaarjan Foundation, a charitable and non-profit organisation dedicated to supporting people most in need. This project aims to support poor children living in these remote villages in particular. I humbly appeal to the international dental community to support this cause. Please, with your donations and support, we can bring back the smiles of our poor children.

Thank you very much for taking the time and all the best for the future.

Dr Sushil Koirala

For more information on how to support the Dental Community for Humanity project, please contact Dr Koirala at drsushilkoirala@gmail.com.