

# Tri-City residents see loss, courage in Nepal



By Ty Beaver – Tri-City Herald

**The destruction was indiscriminate. Buildings reduced to rubble while structures next door were still standing.**

But confidence in buildings in Nepal remain shaken after April's devastating earthquakes. Doctors were still sleeping in their cars this month rather than risk being killed or trapped.

And Jeanne Dillner of the Tri-Cities understood why when she felt an aftershock after crawling into bed one night during her visit to the Himalayan nation.



Dillner, CEO of SIGN Fracture Care International, and the company's founder Lewis Zirkle just returned from Nepal where they'd gone to assess how doctors they trained and equipped to heal broken bones have fared in the disaster.

Nearly \$200,000 has been raised in the Mid-Columbia to help SIGN's efforts in Nepal, Dillner said. Two shipments of supplies were sent to the country before the earthquake and 11 large boxes of supplies were sent later.

SIGN partners with hospitals around the world to provide care and support for broken bones. Many of the communities don't have easy access to medical care and SIGN makes the rods and pins to treat fractures and also trains doctors on how to implant them.

Zirkle and Dillner decided to visit Kathmandu after a conference in East Africa to check up on how the supplies were holding up and how effective emergency and disaster relief operations were functioning. They also wanted to show support for their surgeons.

"It gave them an opportunity to release some of that stress," Dillner said.

They heard stories of fear and loss but also of hope and unity.

Local people gave what they could to support the hospitals, from chipping in money to buy tents for patients to police officers volunteering as orderlies.

One doctor was in the midst of a surgery when a quake struck, shifting the operating table and equipment. He pleaded for his nurses and other doctors to stay and to help him finish. When they left the operating room, they discovered the hospital was deserted.

“My biggest impression was the courage of these surgeons who stayed by their patients,” Zirkle said.

The pair spent the first week of June visiting four hospitals around Kathmandu, donating an additional 200 pounds of supplies.

Zirkle and Dillner said SIGN’s doctors performed well in the tragedy.

They met with a top Nepali weightlifter who received one of SIGN’s implants.

He had broken his leg when he went to search for his son while he and his wife were donating blood and felt the hospital tremble. He found the boy outside and was going back in for his wife when the building collapsed, killing her and others.

“He told (the story) without a lot of emotion but you could tell it traumatized him,” Zirkle said.

And there were numerous tales of people afraid to enter buildings after the quakes. They learned that threats to buildings must be attended to, as well as having ample supplies stored in areas at risk for earthquakes.

Zirkle even performed the first surgery in a new operating room at one hospital. A new technique was needed to implant one of SIGN’s rods, and he was using the opportunity to teach the method to other surgeons.

But the operating room, while an improvement over the surgical tents, hadn’t had all its systems tested.

“A portion of the anesthesia machine began to smoke (after a loud bang) during the procedure,” Dillner said.

“I heard it but I didn’t even think about it” and continued with the surgery, Zirkle said.

Everyone was doing what they could to help, they said, recounting stories of wealthier residents buying medical tents, a local hotel too damaged to be occupied but offering its property for makeshift hospital tents and citizens using their private vehicles to help move patients.

“Everybody did what they could,” Zirkle said.

To learn more about donating to SIGN's efforts in Nepal or elsewhere in the world, visit [signfracturecare.org](http://signfracturecare.org).

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