



# FRIENDS OF PATAN HOSPITAL

# Update 2021

November 2021

Friends of Patan Hospital  
1980 Dahlia Street  
Denver, CO 80220

Friends of Patan Hospital is a 501(c)3 charitable organization that supports health care in Nepal.

## COVID Pandemic at Patan Hospital

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically altered our world, including life at Patan, since our last update in 2019. Here is the story of how the pandemic played out at Patan Hospital:

After their highly successful mass-casualty response to the 2015 earthquakes, leadership at Patan Hospital presciently outlined a

disaster plan for a potential infectious disease emergency. In March 2020, just before the world went into lockdown, the Executive Council at PAHS activated the Hospital Incident Command System and declared a disaster state, which immediately expedited preparations and administrative decisions. The HICS committee met with the executives

of PAHS twice a week throughout the crisis.

To overcome initial fear and panic, Patan conducted several classes to educate staff, and the psychiatry department conducted stress management sessions. Since PPE became almost impossible to procure, they turned one of the medical school faculty offices into a visor

factory and put hospital tailors to work sewing head-to-foot gear from water impermeable cloth they had obtained. They conducted donning-and-doffing training sessions for the new PPE suits. A section of the maternity ward was converted to a laundry where housekeeping staff, in full protective gear, washed



COVID isolation area set up under tents at Patan. Insert: Staff screen for COVID symptoms at entrance to hospital.

## COVID-19 at Patan Hospital *(continued from p. 1)*

and dried the reusable suits. Finally, the hospital arranged hostel accommodation nearby for staff who opted not to return home to their families in order to protect their loved ones from the virus.

Due to the terrible backlogs in COVID testing at the national laboratory, Patan rapidly developed its own PCR lab, buying a new machine, training technicians, and getting the new lab accredited in only three weeks. On-site PCR testing allowed them to free up valuable isolation beds for suspected COVID patients much more quickly. Patan was also the first hospital in Nepal to develop a protocol for providing surgical services for COVID-positive patients, quickly becoming the national referral center for these patients.

In the early phase (March to July 2020), non-COVID patients stayed home and cases were few. This provided a window for preparations but caused severe budget shortfalls as hospital revenue dropped almost 50%. The national lockdown, which was only briefly lifted in July 2020 before having to be reinstated, also caused widespread economic hardship. By the time COVID cases really began to spike in August 2020, staff morale began to flag as they realized how long the pandemic was likely to continue and how much worse things were going to get.

The hospital struggled to provide all its usual services as staff began testing positive and having to be quarantined. Even kitchen staff were stretched to the limit providing meals for an over-full hospital with a skeleton staff. Those who remained often worked for weeks without a

day off. Fortunately, none of the staff fell seriously ill, and most are now vaccinated. The first real surge of COVID patients hit in September 2020, with the inpatient COVID census peaking at 140 patients. The hospital ordered a new oxygen plant, as the old plant had broken down some time earlier and been replaced by portable cylinders connected to the hospital pipe grid. The portable cylinders worked well for the first surge but nearly failed catastrophically at the time of the second surge in May 2021.

At the peak of the second wave in May 2021, oxygen became critically scarce throughout the Kathmandu valley due to the high volume of COVID patients compounded by the panicked hoarding of oxygen cylinders by organizations and individuals. A team of 35 staff and daily laborers at Patan worked round the clock in all weather loading and unloading 100-pound cylinders that could barely be refilled fast enough. Thanks to their heroic efforts, no patients were lost due to interruptions in oxygen flow.

Dr. Mark Zimmerman, a FOPH board member currently working on the wards at Patan Hospital, had this to say of the COVID response at Patan: “Of all the examples of leadership I’ve witnessed over my career, Patan Hospital’s response to this pandemic is exceptional. In a 700-bed hospital receiving only modest government funding and previously caring for 350,000 patients a year, management has created a central block dedicated to COVID care. This meant erecting barriers in each of the four floors to

cordon off sections which could be entered only in PPE. Supply lines of medicine, equipment, food, drinking water, and oxygen course into this isolation bubble, with a single freight elevator linking the floors. Although many hospital staff have tested positive, not one has become seriously ill and all are now fully vaccinated.”

At the time of this writing, November 2021, the ICU at Patan is still full of very sick COVID patients, but the “cataclysmic days of June” – to use Dr. Zimmerman’s words – seem to be over. Hoarding of oxygen by private citizens has ended. The new oxygen plant is up and running. Overall cases at Patan are down to about one-third what they were, and cases in Nepal are down by about 90%. Patan Hospital remains a national leader in COVID care, accepting transfers of COVID-positive patients needing all manner of medical care, especially those who have depleted their funds at private hospitals. With only about 25% of the population vaccinated, Dr. Zimmerman says, “I don’t see how we avoid a third surge, but we can hope.”

Due to the severe financial stressors and general economic devastation brought on by the pandemic, Friends of Patan Hospital felt it was especially appropriate to increase our monetary support for the great work being done at Patan, and especially for the care being provided to those unable to pay. Thanks to recent growth in our endowment fund and the generosity of our donors, we were able to send much more support in 2020 and 2021 than we have in recent years. **In total since 2020, we gave \$100,000 to the Charity Fund and \$100,000 to the Patan Hospital General Fund.**

# Latest News from Patan

## **Professor Dr. Rajesh Gongal named Vice-Chancellor of PAHS**



**Dr. Rajesh Gongal** was the founding dean of the School of Medicine at PAHS and served as Rector of PAHS for many years. He has

dedicated his life to developing health care in Nepal through numerous avenues. After completing a fellowship and a masters degree in palliative care in Northern Ireland, he returned to his native country to establish Hospice Nepal, which opened in the year 2000 as the first palliative care center in Nepal. In 2005, he founded Primary Trauma Care Nepal which has established trauma care courses throughout the country. In 2010, he became the founding president of Nepal Ambulance Service, the first ambulance service in Nepal to run with EMT's mobilized through

a three-digit phone number (like 911 in the U.S.). FOPH is proud to claim Rajesh as one of our own, as he has been on our board of directors from the earliest years. In 2021, to his great credit and to the

great benefit of the institution, he was appointed Vice Chancellor of the Patan Academy of Health Science. We wish Dr. Gongal continued success in all of his endeavors.

### **Okhaldhunga Community Hospital**



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Okhaldhunga Hospital, a Christian mission hospital in rural Nepal, has, like Patan, served as a hybrid hospital during the pandemic, separating COVID treatment from general medical hospital services while continuing obstetric deliveries and lifesaving procedures. A new oxygen plant is being completed this fall to meet current demand. In response to severe budget shortfalls resulting from COVID-related drops in patient visits, FOPH forwarded almost \$19,000 from our donors to Okhaldhunga Hospital and its sister mission hospital in Tansen.



Patients fill the beds in the Intensive Care Unit at Patan hospital.

### *The PAHS Mission Statement*

The Patan Academy of Health Sciences is dedicated to sustained improvement of the health of the people of Nepal, especially those who are poor and living in rural areas, through innovation, equity, excellence and love in education, service and research.



Friends of Patan Hospital

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In 2021, Friends of Patan Hospital finally invested in a long-overdue upgrade to our website. The new site is worth checking out. Share it with your friends and family!!

[www.foph.org](http://www.foph.org)

**Update from Patan Academy of Health Sciences**

The Patan Academy of Health Sciences opened in 2010 to address the severe shortage of Nepali physicians willing and equipped to serve in Nepal's vast rural areas.



Residents making rounds at Patan.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced its educators to make some changes, but PAHS has continued to provide education virtually for its public health, nursing, and medical students, with its Problem-Based Learning modules proving very effective. The rural community postings for medical students had to be conducted virtually but were felt to be fairly successful nonetheless. Leadership continues to “think outside the box” as they continue their ground-breaking innovation in medical education

for the underdeveloped world. FOPH congratulates PAHS on admitting their 10th class of medical students in January of 2020. 75% of students are now on scholarship from the government, making it easier than ever for qualified students from under-resourced rural areas to enter the medical field. Thanks to an especially faithful donor, FOPH was able to send \$2000 specifically to PAHS to be used where needed most.

**Patan Hospital**

Founded in 1982 as a Christian mission hospital in Kathmandu, Nepal, Patan Hospital has evolved into a Nepali-run independent multi-specialty medical facility that has been held up as a model for others to follow. It maintains the values of its founders, providing high-quality, compassionate care to all comers, regardless of ability to pay. The hospital typically sees over 350,000 patients per year and remains financially sustainable by keeping charges at a level that most patients in Nepal can afford. The Patan Academy of Health Sciences was established in 2010 for the purpose of training medical personnel to serve in remote underserved areas throughout Nepal. In 2017, Patan Hospital launched post-graduate training programs in general surgery, internal medicine, pediatrics, OB/GYN, orthopedics, general practice, emergency medicine, ENT, psychiatry, and radiology. A coterie of talented, visionary Nepali physicians has now turned Patan Hospital into one of the premier medical institutions in Nepal, both for patient care and for medical education. They are investing in the intellectual and human capital of Nepal, educating the health care policymakers of the future, and performing cutting edge research to find new and creative ways to tackle the difficult problems at the intersection of poverty and health. Friends of Patan Hospital is privileged to support the vision of these dedicated professionals and follow their lead as they prioritize the hospital's needs and set a course for the future.