

Outback readies doc for mission of mercy



VITAL: The Kushudebu Public Health Mission in Nepal. The health mission's surroundings may be picturesque, but without the luxury of cars, many people have to endure a day's walk to access the medical treatment there

When her five-year stint at a Territory clinic came to an end earlier this year, Dr Ros Vaughan headed for the hills. And not just any hills — the Himalayas. **KYLIE STEVENSON** reports

ON A mild morning in the small village of Junbesi, Dr Ros Vaughan is squinting at an X-ray.

Positioned on a light box hooked up to a power outlet on a veranda, she's examining the insides of a Tibetan nun's ankle.

Although the woman has limped for more than an hour along a dusty track to reach the clinic, Dr Vaughan is sending her back with no more than paracetamol to ease her pain, which has been plaguing her for a couple of months.

Next in, a young boy has been vomiting for several days. Then, a man with ear wax issues.

And another nun, suffering hypertension. And a Sherpa man with arthritis.

Australian Dr Vaughan, 61, is at the Kushudebu Public Health Mission, in Nepal's Everest region, volunteering her expertise

for four weeks. At 2675m and nestled in a valley surrounded by towering, pine-tipped mountains, Junbesi is home to about 150 people, but hundreds make the journey from villages as far as a day's walk away to access medical treatment there.

"Dr Ros has a very good heart. She's come from such a long way to help our community. We really appreciate her kindness and her help," says the clinic's director Ang Tshering Sherpa. Also a trekking guide, Ang started Kushudebu Public Health Mission in 2005 with the help of some donations from Australians he met in his work as a guide for World Expeditions.

"The government clinic was not providing enough medicine and many people had to go on to Phaplu — a three hour walk — longer if you're sick," he says.

He has since got the travel company he guides for on-board with the health mission, with the World Expeditions incorporating volunteer work at the clinic into its community project travel program. His guide work also paid off when he told Dr Vaughan about the project as they trekked the Anupurna region in 2007. She agreed to come back and help out.

"The people in Nepal are so wonderful and community oriented, and I thought, I'd really like to come back here," she says.

"The place had given me so much and I was so impressed by their community values."

Although it's thousands of kilometres from her last posting at Ampilatwatja

clinic, 320km northeast of Alice Springs, Dr Vaughan has discovered the problems patients presented with were often familiar. Conjunctivitis, fungal infections, high blood pressure, bronchitis, fractures and dietary-related health issues are common.

"There's a lot of gastric problems — ulcers, gastritis — about 50 per cent of patients presenting have gastric issues," she says.

Although she's been doing locum work all over the Territory since 1998, in Nepal Dr Vaughan has learned a new meaning to the word "remote".

"I haven't heard a car for over a month," she says happily. She's staying in a small guest house

and community support, the Kushudebu clinic is surprisingly well-equipped, with an X-ray machine and dark room for processing, a supply of quality medicines and lab in which tests are conducted.

The health mission employs one doctor of general medicine, Kumar Shrestha, one midwifery nurse and two volunteer auxiliary nurses who also assist in community education. As distance is a problem for many who are ill, Kushudebu staff often undertake community work, venturing out into nearby villages to both educate and treat the locals.

Dr Vaughan did one such mission, visiting Thuten Chholing Monastery. A

'Dr Ros has a very good heart. She's come from such a long way to help our community'

overlooking the little village, with sometimes hot water and intermittent electricity.

While the isolation may be quaint, in her line of work it also has a serious side.

"We had a 16-year-old boy who had to be carried by stretcher to the nearest hospital in Phaplu, about three hours away," she says.

"Very serious cases will fly from there to Kathmandu, but many families here can't afford that. We can't even ring ahead to tell them we're sending a patient — we have no phones here."

Also lacking is electricity, which is on from 10am to 2pm each day, dictating the clinic's hours.

Thanks to generous donors

45-minute walk from Junbesi, the Tibetan refugee monastery is home to about 500 monks and nuns who regularly have to make the trip to Kushudebu for health advice. "On that day, we saw 131 people in one day and had to walk home in the dark," says Dr Vaughan.

Now back in Australia, Dr Vaughan has jobs lined up in the Territory at Kintore, 80km from the WA border, and at Elcho Island, as well as in Grafton, northern NSW. "The work there is so much more rewarding than in the city," she says.

FOR more information on the mission in Nepal's Everest region, go to www.kushudebu.org.np/



SPARTAN: The Kushudebu Public Health Mission has no phones and intermittent electricity



VOLUNTEER: Doctor Kumar Shrestha (left) and Dr Ros Vaughan examine a patient's X-ray

Human Rights



Share your views about how we should protect and promote human rights in Australia by registering to attend a community roundtable coming to **Darwin**. Frank Brennan, Mary Kostakidis, Mick Palmer or Tammy Williams will lead discussions.

DATE: 1 June 2009

TIME: 12pm - 2pm and 6pm - 8pm

LOCATION: SkyCity Darwin, Gilruth Ave, The Gardens, Darwin.

PH: 1800 086 134

REGISTER ONLINE:

www.humanrightsconsultation.gov.au

For more information visit www.humanrightsconsultation.gov.au



CONDITIONED: Dr Vaughan's experiences working at remote Ampilatwatja, 320km northeast of Alice Springs, have prepared her for volunteer work at the mission



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND FAMILIES

foster care



Information Night

Foster care is for children and young people from 0 to 17 years who need a stable family environment until they can be returned home safely. Children may need foster care for a few days, weeks, months or longer.

Foster carers play an important role in our community, right across the Territory.

If you would like to know more about providing support and guidance to a child or young person in need, come along to our Foster Care Information Night.

When 6.00 pm Wednesday 27 May 2009

Venue Multi Purpose Room, Ground Floor Casuarina Plaza, Corner Trower Road and Vanderlin Drive (Entrance at rear, near Community Care Clinic)

Call 1800 814 599

Visit www.nt.gov.au/fostercare

fresh ideas | real results

www.nt.gov.au



Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing

National Men's Health Policy Alice Springs and Darwin Forums

Alice Springs: 2 June 2009, Darwin: 3 June 2009

The Department of Health and Ageing is pleased to invite members of the community, especially men, to attend forums being held in Alice Springs and Darwin as part of the development of Australia's first National Men's Health Policy.

The forums are an opportunity for men to hear about health issues that affect them, to speak up about areas of concern and to ensure the National Men's Health Policy includes what men themselves want and need.

The forums are also an opportunity to meet some of Australia's newly appointed Men's Health Ambassadors and hear what men's health means to them.

Alice Springs

Date: Tuesday, 2 June 2009

Time: 6pm-8pm

Venue: Voyages Alice Springs Resort

34 Stott Terrace

Darwin

Date: Wednesday, 3 June 2009

Time: 6pm-8pm

Venue: Nightcliff Middle School

Ryland Road, Nightcliff

Venues open from 5 pm. Come early to meet other men and enjoy some light refreshments.

To RSVP, send an e-mail to: national.mens.health.policy@health.gov.au or call 02 6289 6859. There is no cost to attend the forums. Your RSVP is important for catering.

The *Developing a National Men's Health Policy for Australia - Resource Kit* will provide the basis of discussion. See the National Men's Health Policy website, www.health.gov.au/menshealthpolicy, for copies or for further information.

hmsC098949