

Mike and Fiona's News

June-July 2020

Psalm 46:10 "Be still and know that I am God."

Dear friends and family,

We hope you have all stayed well and are coping with the lockdown and isolation over these past 4 months. It is good to be in touch with many of you and thank you for your prayers and for many generous gifts to Ear Aid Nepal and INF. We are long overdue for sending our newsletter and would like to bring you up to date with what is happening both here and in Nepal.



Mike and I came home together in late February, as planned, to spend some time with the family and especially our mothers.

It felt strange wearing facemasks on the plane but in Asia that is common anyway.

Having taken 24 hours to get home, with disruptions to flights and missed connections, we arrived safely, and Fiona went straight to Sussex to be with her mother who had just been discharged from hospital while Mike went to see his mother in Guildford.

We met up a few days later and travelled to Fuerteventura for a walking holiday in the beautiful but very arid countryside. Our flight out was delayed 48 hours by storm Dennis and our return was briefly delayed thanks to a sand-storm but it was worth it for a very relaxing and much needed break.

By early March there were signs of the Corona virus spreading across Europe but nothing too alarming at that stage. Mike therefore returned to Nepal while Fiona stayed in the UK to spend more time with her mother.

However, 2 weeks later the situation changed. Mike started to feel very uneasy about being away from the family in case they became unwell or indeed if he became sick on his own.

With advice from the INF leadership he decided to return to UK and after a lot of heart searching and time spent trying to arrange travel, managed to get one of the last (business class!) scheduled flights out of Nepal on 22nd March. Fiona picked him up at Heathrow and we went



into 2 weeks isolation at home. We were well looked after by our daughter Abi and her boyfriend Jack who did our shopping and kept us company through the window. Then Mike's mum was taken ill so he went to stay with her for some days.

Fiona is on the INF member-care committee and attends monthly zoom meetings to see how the expat team are managing with the difficult conditions of lockdown on top of escalating visa renewal issues caused by the government offices being closed and the difficulty of getting to Kathmandu. Fiona regularly contacts friends who are in Nepal or who have recently left.

Fiona continues monthly language lessons on-line with her teacher Sunita whose husband is an elder of our church in Pokhara. This helps her keep up to date with what is happening especially among the elderly and disadvantaged members.



We also message our landlord in Nepal who is looking after our flat, and with his daughter and family who live in Hampshire. Since leaving Nepal things have moved on at Green Pastures hospital. The team there rapidly turned the Ear Centre into an



isolation area, started screening anyone who came to the gate, stopped all routine work and began

training staff. It was thought the hospital be used as an overflow facility (pictures courtesy of



would INF team).



The government

instituted a lockdown (renewed many times since March), people were only allowed out for local food shopping and most road and public transport ceased. All of this led to a severe financial loss for the hospital. All patients other than the poorest pay for or make a significant contribution towards their care. Only in this way can we maintain a long-term, financially



sustainable service. There were considerable concerns about our ability to retain and pay staff. Virus cases were actually very few in Nepal and virtually none in Pokhara, so some local patients started to find their way back to the hospital and some surgery was done.

ENT is considered a high-risk specialty for COVID because all the work is with the respiratory tract. There is limited scientific information, but ear surgery, especially the use of a drill for the mastoid bone is thought to be an especially high risk. So, for a while surgery stopped again, but as local virus cases were so few, work resumed in a small way. People with hearing problems often rely on lip reading, so the Speech therapy team developed face masks with see-through panels.



Then we started to hear that many Nepali migrant workers in India, were finding their way back into Nepal despite the closed borders. As we write, this has led to increasing virus cases in the country, we are all worried that this many mean the hospital has to close down again for routine work and that the Ear Centre may be needed as an isolation unit. This would of course be a valuable service, but that leaves the financial strain. We have been incredibly grateful for gifts we have received during this time, these and existing donor agreements will enable us to cover necessary staff costs at least for a few more months. INF staff usually have a one-year rolling contract, this is going to be renewed, for six months initially this time, which is a great relief to many. After training so many it would also be huge loss if we had not been able to keep them on the team.



Picture shows Mr Eka Dev, our manager's recent birthday celebration, with some of the Ear Centre team.

Despite being away from Nepal, Mike has kept busy coordinating links with two important international research trials for developing

hearing aids for Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs).

He has also joined an international committee of advocacy for hearing health, with an organization called the Coalition for Global Hearing Health (CGHH). This has strong links with the WHO and World Hearing Forum. He has also been editing some of his surgical videos, which hopefully can be put on the educational pages of the Ear Aid Nepal website in due course.

He is in regular touch with the hospital team and hopes to return to Nepal once the lockdown and travel re-open safely. Aside from all this he is building a radio-controlled model yacht, and very much hopes to do some real sailing before the summer ends!

Lockdown has not been all bad, thanks to the wonderful weather and in recent months we have been cycling or walking almost every day discovering birds and flowers of the wonderful Herefordshire countryside. Like so many others we have built raised vegetable beds and repaired our greenhouse, so we are to be found each day checking the tomatoes, courgettes, lettuce and much more!



We have also much enjoyed zoom church meetings with our local fellowship in Bodenham, while keeping in touch with friends and doing what we can to help

our church in Naya Gaun. Many church members and their neighbours there usually survive on daily wages, the church has worked hard to help meet those needs and to maintain fellowship.

This has been a valuable time to rest, take stock, catch up and to pray.

We have found comfort in the verses of Psalm 91, such as:
Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

With love and God Bless,

Mike and Fiona

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कोरोनाभाइरस सचेतना
COVID-19

व्यक्तिगत सरसफाई नार्इ ध्यान दिजौ । Maintain your personal hygiene.
आफू पनि बच्ची, अरुनाई पनि बच्चाओ । Protect yourself & others from getting sick!

लक्षणहरू Symptoms

- उच्च ज्वरो High Fever
- सूख्खा थोडी Dry Cough
- सोरो Sore Throat
- डाउको दुखाई Headache
- उत्साह उपस्थान कलसा Shortness of breath

पटक पटक साबुन घसीने हात धुने वा सेनिटाइजर प्रयोग गर्ने
Frequently wash your hands with soap or use hand sanitiser

साथै बिपत्ती भएमा वा घोरसाइतमा जाउ मात्र थपक लगाउने
Wear a face mask if you are unwell and in crowded places

हात नोक्नहाउने वा चापेलेस उपकरण सम्पर्क नगर्ने
Avoid shaking hands or making direct contact with people

बोसो वा हाँसिएउ सट्टी नाक मुख छोपेने
Always cover your face while coughing or sneezing

बन्दसघक विट्टुम बगर्ने तथा घोरसाइत बाट टाढै रहने
Avoid crowds and maintain physical distancing from others

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