

In the Foothills of Medicine: A Young Doctor's Journey from the Inner City of Chicago to the Mountains of Nepal

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Dr. Robert McKersie, the author is a family physician in Chicago, the United States of America. He treats the underprivileged in Chicago and frequently visits Nepal where he is associated with Himalayan Healthcare. This delightful book deals with the period of his residency training and his frequent 'medical treks' to remote villages of Nepal.

The prologue deals with his first visit to Kathmandu and his experiences at the Tribhuvan International airport. The trek to the Ganesh Himal area north of Kathmandu is delightfully written. The village of Tipling, his experience of treating a big crowd of villagers and the helicopter rescue of a person suffering from appendicitis are written in detail.

The trek continued on to Sertung village where the team of doctors and paramedics struggled to save the life of a Tamang woman suffering from septicemia. They maintained her blood pressure on dopamine and intravenous fluids. The trek in the dark across a treacherous ravine to Tipling using a flashlight to bring intravenous fluids was an act of courage. The fervent wish for a broad spectrum antibiotic and the fortuitous finding of a vial of Imipenem among the medical supplies has been beautifully described.

Robert was a late arrival to medical school at the age of 32 when he joined Rush medical college in Chicago. The author analyses the problems with the American healthcare system in detail. Among the industrialized countries, America may be unique in that it does not guarantee healthcare to all of its citizens. Medical insurance is not available to all Americans. The problems of the uninsured in accessing healthcare form a recurrent theme throughout the book. He compares Nepal and the USA. In Nepal due to lack of resources and the difficult terrain many individuals cannot access healthcare. In America the main and often only barrier to access is economic.

The marginalization and poverty of African Americans in

inner city areas is a major issue. Broken families and teen age pregnancies are not uncommon. The issue of striking a balance between maintaining a professional demeanor and of empathizing with the patient has been covered. Getting involved with the patient exerts a heavy emotional toll and many doctors tend to keep a distance!

The relationship between doctors and nurses has been covered in detail. At the start of their medical career, the doctors have theoretical knowledge but little practical experience in managing patients. They are often dependent on the vast experience of a nurse. The hierarchical nature of the doctor nurse relationship with the doctor being superior and more knowledgeable is not always true!

The author's rather stormy relationship with Katarina, a Russian-Czech lady is covered in detail. She was living in Prague, he was studying in Chicago and eventually due to many reasons the relationship did not work out. The valiant fight to save Sheri, suffering from tuberculosis, AIDS and septicemia was a tough call for all concerned. The technological sophistication of American medicine is evident on perusing through the pages of the book. Dr. Robert has a knack for explaining tough medical terms and conditions in easily understandable language.

His interaction with Dr. Martin Million, a family physician for more than 40 years is poignant and touching. The constant sleep deprivation, emotional and physical fatigue during internship and residency has been well brought out. The work pressure is draconian and many collapse under the strain. Many residents are reduced to walking zombies and the effect of this on patient care still awaits study.

The author's visit as a full fledged doctor to the Dr. Megh Bahadur Parajuli clinic in Ilam saw him working with two idealistic Nepalese doctors. Our craze for all things foreign, including a foreign doctor has been detailed with a touch of

irony. The struggle to manage a case of 'status epilepticus' among a clinic staff brings to the fore the emotional aspects of treating one's colleagues, friends and relatives. The work of Himalayan Healthcare (www.himalayan-healthcare.org) in taking medical care to the remote areas of Nepal has been described.

The glossary of terms and the references are comprehensive. The black and white photographs are starkly beautiful. I personally would have liked an account of the other treks conducted by the author in Nepal and a more detailed pen picture of some of the Nepalese patients.

All in all the book is a wonderful read and is simply written in non-medical language. All those interested in the practice of medicine and the healthcare system in US and in remote villages of Nepal will find the book of interest!

About the book: **Author:** Robert McKersie

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