

THE NEPAL PROSTHESIS CENTRE

Past — Present — Future

Past

Although a long felt need, the availability of a Prosthetic Service is a recent development in this country. The pioneer Prosthesis Department was established in Tansen by Dr. William Gould in 1966 and this unit served the Palpa Area with additional patients from the North - West, but was relatively inaccessible prior to the completion of the Kathmandu-Pokhara highway for the populace Kathmandu Valley patients.

The prime mover for a national centre was Dr. Johs G. Andreson who served briefly as the Danish advisor to The Nepal Leprosy Relief Association. His extensive correspondence resulted in a small meeting on September 25, 1970 which coincided with the visit of Mr. L.V. Wollstein, German master orthopaedic technician who had previously participated in the founding of National Prosthetics Centres in Finland and Ireland, and was in charge of the Prosthetics Unit at Kaligiri. In a six page comprehensive report Mr. Wollstein outlined the aims of the proposed centre as:

- 1) Supplying patients with artificial arms and legs, appliances, and other aids required.
- 2) Training Junior Staff.
- 3) Experimental work toward special problems.
- 4) Maintenance of Hospital Orthopaedic equipment such as wheel chairs.
- 5) Cooptive work with other departments of physiotherapy and occupational therapy to assist in the rehabilitation programme.

A second and much larger meeting followed on February 24, 1971 the day following the conclusion of the 5th All Nepal Medical Convention. Those in attendance gave a wide geographical representation of concerned medical and lay persons.

Present were Dr. N.K. Shah (HMG), Dr. W.M. Could, (Shanta Bhawan,) Dr. A. Hai-Khan (Birgunj), Sergeant Ian Poynter, representing Major H.M. Melsom (R.A.M.C., Dharan) Messrs C.D. Upreti and H.M. Bhandari representing Mr. K.B. Basnet (Disabled Persons Association), Dr. Gerald Turner (Pokhara), Mr. Frank Wilcox (UMN), Dr. S. Lange (Kunde Hospital), Dr. Sathia Nathan (WHO), Dr. John Harris (Anandaban), Mr. D.R. Dhakhawa, representing Dr. C. Giri (Red Cross), and Dr. G.J. Mack (Shanta Bhawan).

The meeting approved to send a young Kathmandu man to Kaligiri under the sponsorship of the Leprosy Mission, for 12 months training. A donor agency was required for the capital costs of a prosthetics work shop and this was found in Bread for the World (Dienstesin Eubersee.)

At that meeting the six hospitals represented estimated that they performed approximately 50 amputations annually. Initial priority was to be given to the fitting lower extremity prosthesis. It was also urged that the future centre should develop standardised documentation that could be used for eventual research and educational purposes. The number of amputations resulting from neglected tourniquets was particularly emphasised but also the relationship between Buerger's Disease and smoking was felt to be not widely enough recognised.

Present

The Nepal Prosthesis Centre has been operational since mid-July, 1972 at its temporary location on the grounds of Shanta Bhawan Hospital in Sanepa. A constitution for the centre was adopted on June 1 and has been registered under the National Society Act, "The supreme organ of the Centre shall be the General Body. It shall be convened by the Executive Committee and shall normally be once a year...." Membership of the General Body will be by invitation initially and include a wide representation of medical institutions and resources and interested lay persons.

The Executive Committee "shall consist of eight members, the Chairman (The Minister of Health, ex-officio), a Vice Chairman (Dr. A.K. Sharma), the Executive Secretary (Dr. William Gould), Treasurer (Mr. P. Collier), Workshop Manager (Mr. A. Vossberg, ex-officio), and three members from the General Body (Professor Singh, and Messrs K.B. Basnet and A. Remal)."

The Centre is open from Monday through Saturday, from 8-5 p.m. On Thursdays at 2.30 to 3.30 P.M. Major M.M. Malla, Orthopaedic surgeon from the Military Hospital conducts a clinic for new patients. These must be referred by a doctor and on the official referral form addressed to Major Malla. These forms can be obtained by writing the Nepal Prosthesis Centre

temporarily at Box No. 252, Kathmandu.

At present works is confined to below knee prostheses (Rs. 200/-), long leg calipers (Rs. 150/-), fixed ankle brace (Rs.100/-), orthopaedic shoes (Rs. 70/-), kneecap (Rs.20/-), and foot drop splint (Rs. 30/-). These are fixed prices and posted in the Centre. Major Malla is available at this clinic for recommendation and guidance in the selection of the appliance required. The Rotary club of Kathmandu has offered to pay for a number of indigent prostheses but the hope is that the Centre can be self-sufficient and referring doctors are requested to help the Centre achieve this goal. The Shanta Bhawan physiotherapist also attends Major Malla's clinics. The Physiotherapy Department can provide Plastizote cervical collars. By July 1973 a complete range to prosthetic and orthopaedic appliances will be available (back braces, above knee and upper extremity prostheses etc.)

The inability to provide above knee prostheses at this time is less serious in the light of the lead editorial in the September 1972 Archives of Surgery which in emphasizing the advantages of below knee amputation reads:

"few elderly above knee amputees can walk well with a prosthesis. This is in marked contrast to the ability of many elderly bilateral and most unilateral below-knee amputees to walk with a prosthesis. Warren and Kihn point out that healing in the below-knee amputation is as successful statistically with or without a popliteal pulse. A below knee stump as short as 2 inches below the tibial plateau is useful. Proprioception is much better than for the above-knee amputee, improving the chances for the development of a skillful automatic gait. Furthermore, patients with diabetic gangrene often come to amputation of the second lower limb. It is much easier for them to learn to walk on two prostheses if at least one is below the knee."

Future

To serve as a National Prosthesis Centre will require that some arrangement be made for travel concessions for disable patients to travel from outside the valley. Negotiations are now under way which may also include hostel accommodation during the stay in Kathmandu.

By March 1973 German orthopaedic master, Mr. Andreas Vossberg will be seconded by the United Mission to the Centre. This will permit the local training of several further technicians and also a broader range of orthopaedic appliances and prostheses including above knee and upper extremity.

The Disabled and Blind Persons Association also hope to develop a rehabilitation complex in the valley which will eventually include hostel accommodation a Prosthesis Centre, and rehabilitation training. When the site is chosen and the centre started, the present temporary location will be transferred there.