

I am a Dentist

Dr. Dinesh Sharma Bhusal,¹ Dr. Bodh Bikram Karki,² Dr. Ujjwal Joshi³

¹Department of Dental Surgery, National Academy of Medical Sciences, Bir Hospital, Kathmandu, Nepal;

²Department of Dental Surgery, Nepal Police Hospital, Kathmandu, Nepal;

³Department of Oral Medicine and Radiology, KIST Medical College, Lalitpur, Nepal.

Correspondence:

Dr. Dinesh Sharma Bhusal. Email: drbhusal80@gmail.com

After succeeding the Nepal Medical Council Licensing Examination (NMCLE), we were officially the Dentists. The NMCLE made us realise that finally, we had the license to work as Dental Surgeons but along with the opportunity and credibility, it had also given us new challenges.

While walking through the streets of Kathmandu, I along with Dr. Dinesh Nepal and Dr. Bishwo Prachanda Sedhain started to discuss about our future plans. Though, we were involved in various clinical activities and community camps during student life, the feeling this time was different. Our discussions focused more on our professional career. It was truly very exciting to think on choosing the professional track: whether to start private practice, join government service, work in private clinic, or to work in any organization for the living. We compared ourselves with other professionals like engineers, bank employees, officers, teachers, lawyers, and many others. We thought that now as we already have the license to practice, we can earn as any other professionals. We had great expectations and aspirations for the profession. Being born, brought-up and studied in Nepal itself, we strongly felt that we should work for our own people, the Nepalese. Then, came the feeling of responsibility towards the people and towards the country, realising that we should go to the community and serve.

Our debate continued which led us to some crucial questions: What are we going to do? How will be our work evaluated? Who will assess it? How can our work be appraised? Is there any way to do that? We thought of presenting ourselves in seminars, conferences, carry out paper presentations, conduct research works in the field of Dentistry to prove where a Nepalese Dentist stands.

By doing so, we simply wanted to help recognize the work of the Nepalese Dentists. However, we felt that work evaluation of any professional was a very tough job as it aroused hundreds of questions and answered very few.

There were no satisfying answers to our questions but this did not stop our investigation. Then, we returned to Dharan to complete our internship. Meanwhile, Dr. Bodh Bikram Karki and I visited Sarlahi (his home) and Butwal (my home) to explore further. This journey was pleasant and enlightening: we got the answer to our unsolved query. During our journey, we realized that the work of the Nepalese Dentists could be seen easily in the oral cavities of the Nepalese people. Any oral cavity of a Nepalese can evaluate our work as a Nepalese Dentist. And, they were the ones who evaluated our work. Finally, we had our answers that were worth relying. However, these answers could not lead us to any action, we could just think or hope with smile or rather grin. At that moment, we could not come up with any means to improve the oral health status of the Nepalese people.

On our way back from my home by bus, somewhere along the twists and turns of the hilly highway road near Daunne, we came up with an idea to create awareness among our people. It evoked a desire to explore our country with an oral health message to the public. We thought it would be better if we can get to as many people as we can while spreading the message. Our mission would be a message from the dentists of Nepal to Nepalese people on a bicycle tour. This was the final sentence in our conversation on the bus.

After reaching home, we shared this idea with family

members and they were all delighted to hear it. We started thinking seriously about how it could be materialised. Bodh and I decided that after the internship, our first work will be a “bicycle tour” from Mechi to Mahakali with an oral health message. We started visualizing ourselves with a hand mirror, teeth model and a toothbrush educating hundreds of people on how to brush the teeth. While sharing this idea with Dr. Ujjwal Joshi, he also got excited and couldn't resist asking us to let him join the campaign. Now, we were three in a team and our task was to implement the project.

After the completion of internship, we decided to search sponsors for the bicycle tour project. We gathered in Kathmandu and started visiting different companies. Everyone we met got fascinated with our idea and praised it to be an innovative one but when it came for a sponsorship none came forth. None of the toothpaste companies, dental suppliers, pharmaceuticals, organizations or individuals were ready to help us materially. This time we once again got frustrated in our journey to oral health awareness.

We used to sit in a temple at Kathmandu Durbar Square and discuss about the possibilities. We almost came to the conclusion that this dream could be a reality only after we earn money by ourselves. We were thus mentally prepared to postpone the idea till the time we had earned enough for the tour, tentatively for some months or a year. After fifteen futile days in Kathmandu, late in an evening at Basantapur we decided to disperse with heavy heads. It was a feeling of stumble in the very first step. With the tiredness on our legs, we were reluctant to move ahead, amidst the crowd we felt lonely. We couldn't think of anyone who would help resuscitating our idea. With no hope but as the last attempt we decided to contact the president of Nepal Dental Association (NDA) Dr. Sushil Koirala.

Next day we met Dr. Sushil Koirala and briefed our mission to him. He was keen on listening to our proposal. The first thing he asked was: how did you think of it? We answered him that we are the Dentists of Nepal and we think accordingly. We narrated him our whole story. He assured us that he would help us out in some way. We discussed that the program could be done under the umbrella of NDA. After the meeting that evening, we departed without heavy weight on our heads. This was the happiest day so far for us and we shared the evening with Dr. Ujjwal's family at Bhaktapur. That night, we viewed the maps of Nepal trying to figure out the route for our journey.

In the NDA meeting held at its office at Sunrise Homes, Lalitpur, we joined other NDA executives. The members appreciated our proposal deciding to hold the program with two oral health slogans: “Brush twice a day” and “Don't use tobacco and tobacco products.” The meeting declared it to be a National Campaign.

The most vital thing that was realized during NDA meeting was that the ignorance regarding oral health is the culprit for occurrence of most of the oral diseases and the reason for survival of dental quacks in the society.

Then, we left Kathmandu with a notification letter from NDA stating that the proposal was accepted mentioning the program schedule. Meanwhile, Dr. Bodh and I started working at College of Dentistry, BPKIHS, Dharan and Dr. Ujjwal was working in a Hospital at Thimi, Bhaktapur. We bought a bicycle from our first salary and started practicing during the evening.

As days passed by, the efforts of Nepal Dental Association, its President, and other well wishers helped raise the fund. Dental colleges of Nepal and many individual Dental Surgeons voluntarily co-operated in making this program a success. A huge amount of money was indeed required for such campaign to be a success.

Finally, the day arrived when the program started. The journey began from Mechi, the eastern end of Nepal to Mahakali, the western end of Nepal. We rode on mountain bikes with “National Tooth Brushing Campaign - 2007” slogan on our vests with oral health awareness pamphlet, tooth model and tooth brush carried in bags. We were escorted by dental mobile van of Kantipur Dental College and Hospital.

This was not the end of our journey but it was a beginning to the road to our professional career. Few desires, aspirations, struggles, failures, amusements, sufferings and accomplishments were the landmark experiences we came across. We are sure that not just us, but everyone in this profession traverse through such a rough road that finally leads to success.

There are basically two reasons why we chose this type of program. The first and foremost thing is that dental caries and gingivitis; the most common oral diseases are preventable. The awareness regarding this fact can greatly reduce such public health problems in the society. The success of this program would be

worthwhile only if a large number of people can be educated and motivated through our bicycle tour at their door step. Furthermore, the involvement of media for such campaign at the local and national level can inform larger number of population in spreading such messages.

The second important reason of our campaign is for the recognition of a dental surgeon. Along with oral health awareness messages, it is crucial for us to educate people on; Who is a Dentist? What does s/he do? How and Where s/he is trained? Where to treat dental /oral diseases?

Nepalese society has not only been suffering from the shortage of dental professionals but has also been

failing to recognize the true dental professionals. Thus, this campaign also endeavors once again to introduce the Dentist with BDS (Bachelor of Dental Surgery) or equivalent degree to the Nepalese society. We sincerely want people to know the fact that the oral and dental diseases are best treated by the people who are educated and trained accordingly. They are none other than the Dental Surgeons or the Dentists. As the dentists of Nepal, we have responsibilities and challenges to educate and aware the people on oral health problems; manage and treat oral diseases; and alleviate the dental pain and sufferings of Nepalese people. At the same time, the young dental professionals need to catch up with the ever changing technologies and innovations of modern global dentistry. Thus, as a beginner we want to start from the basics - "BRUSH TWICE A DAY".

NATIONAL TOOTH BRUSHING CAMPAIGN IN NUMBERS

Total distance covered	: 1160 kms
Total days travelled	: 22 days
Total days cycled	: 17 days
Total schools visited	: 85
Total number of students covered under direct oral health education program	: 25,000 (approximately)
Total number of dental colleges visited	: 5
Total dental surgeons met	: 170
Total number of dental students met	: 800
Total number of pamphlets containing oral health information distributed	: 2,500
Total number of leaflets containing oral health information distributed	: 10,000
Maximum distance covered in a day (Lamahi to Nepalgunj)	: 118 km
Minimum distance covered in a day (Bhaluwang to Lamahi)	: 25 km
Maximum speed of the cycle	: 60 km/ hr
Average speed	: 17 km / hr
Average daily cycling time	: 4 hours 49 seconds
Total cycling time of the campaign	: 68 hours 14 minutes 7 seconds
Total number of zones covered	: 10
Total number of districts covered	: 24
Total amount of Water intake throughout the tour	: 475 liters
Total numbers of journalists met	: 95
Total newspapers that covered 'National Tooth Brushing Campaign'	: 35
Total number of people who heard about 'National Tooth Brushing Campaign' directly or indirectly from TV, radios, newspapers, pamphlets, leaflets etc.	: 20,00,000 (approximately)

(Reprinted from Dentistry Nepal, Vol.3 No. 1 2008 with the permission from author)