

ELECTIVE (SSC5c) REPORT (1200 words)

A report that addresses the above four objectives should be written below. Your Elective supervisor will assess this.

The 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck on Saturday at 11.56am on the 25th of April. I had been planning to go to Chitwan for the weekend and would have been on a bus on the small winding mountainous roads much closer to the epicenter. Fortunately, I had decided instead to work on an abstract for a project that I had been working on earlier in the year and stayed at home. I was on my laptop on the ground floor and I initially thought it was an airplane as they tend to fly very low over Kathmandu. The sound got louder and louder and then the ground began to shake violently. My first thought was to get into a doorway but I noticed someone running out of the house opposite and decided that was a better idea. I ran barefoot out of the front door and past the swinging metal gate into the alleyway where around 10 other people had congregated. We stood huddled together at a T-junction between houses and a large 12-foot brick wall. The ground continued to shake and it sounded like continuous thunder. The garden walls around us fell and water tanks sat up on the tops of the houses fell onto buildings below. Fortunately neither of the building we were standing next to collapsed. It's difficult to remember how long the earthquake lasted as it was followed by dozens of aftershocks. The alley to the hospital was narrow, about 200m long with 5-6 story buildings either side with a few long 20 foot walls and water tanks - it was difficult to know whether to stay put or risk the walk. After about 30-45 minutes as the aftershocks began to settle slightly, I decided to venture back into the house to find my shoes and make my way to the hospital.

As I got to the hospital, the open space in front was complete chaos. There were wounded people on the floor in every direction. There was a vast array of injuries ranging from head traumas to open wounds and multiple fractures. We stabilized fractures with plaster slabs, sutured and dressed wounds and referred more serious cases to a nearby medical hospital with better facilities than ours. As it was a Saturday, there were only two doctors on duty, two paramedics and a handful of nurses. We worked as quickly as we could to stabilize the patients and didn't stop until around 2am. We treated 150 patients. Everyone was terrified that there could be another one at any point and no-one wanted to sleep inside. I slept in an ambulance with three other people that night, being woken every hour or so by another aftershock.

I spent the next 4 days working at the hospital from 5am to 10pm. We saw over 100 patients each day, many making long journeys from remote areas of Nepal. Transport links were already poor but landslides had caused many areas to become inaccessible. I spoke to many patients who had been carried for hours or even days before they were able to get a bus to the capital. Several members of staff at the hospital lost relatives and the majority of staff's home villages were destroyed.

I spoke to a friend in England who helped to set up a charity for an ambulance service in Nepal a few years ago. They had collected lots of money but had not had a huge amount of contact with the team in Kathmandu and wanted to know details on how they had been getting on, whether they needed any extra support and also how best to spend the money. Up until this point I had not left the local

area of the hospital and the thought of travelling around Kathmandu was very daunting. It felt like going out into a war zone. I took medical supplies and food and water and went to find the ambulance service. After a brief round of introductions we were soon out on our first of dozens of calls. The ambulances had been coordinating with the Nepali and Indian army and were transferring patients being brought in by helicopters from the worst affected areas like Sindhupalchowk and Gorkha and taking them to various hospitals around Kathmandu. I spent 4 days with the paramedics helping to triage the patients on arrival and keeping them stable until we got them to hospital. I got to see a much wider range of injuries and was able to travel around the whole of Kathmandu to see the full extent of the damage to the city. I went to almost all of the hospitals and many of the temporary field hospitals set up by various armies from around the world. I later went back to help the ambulance service after the second big earthquake and it was very interesting to see how different and how much more organized things were once a bit of time had passed after the first earthquake.

By the time the second large earthquake occurred over two weeks later on the 12th of May, things had begun to get a little more normal in the capital and no-one was expecting it. I was assisting in theatre on the third floor of the hospital. For me this earthquake was scarier than the first. We stayed with the patient beside the operating table and just had to wait for it to finish, not knowing how big it was going to be, how long it was going to last or whether the building would remain standing after the initial damage from the first earthquake. Fortunately it was only 7.3 in magnitude. We finished the operation and evacuated from the hospital. This earthquake really disrupted any return to normality and left people feeling like another large one was just around the corner and that they could die at any time. The change in pattern of injuries was also very interesting, with the majority of injuries now from jumping of balconies and falling over while running, as opposed to being injured by collapsing buildings.

I feel I learnt a huge amount in my time in Nepal. My knowledge of orthopaedics has increased vastly from assessing and treating trauma patients to assisting in theatre. I have a much better understanding of the difficulties in providing aid in disaster situations along with the political and logistical problems that can arise.

I made many close friends in those 3 weeks and I felt very guilty when it came time for me to leave. I felt it was unfair that I got to leave while everyone else had to continue living with the stress and fear and the devastating effects of the earthquake, which will take years to recover from. Ultimately I feel very fortunate to have been in a position to have been able to help and I am looking forward to going back to visit them and Nepal in the future.