‘The Snow Leopard’ and User-Driven Healthcare

P. Ravi Shankar, Department of Medical Education, KIST Medical College, Lalitpur, Nepal

In the year 1973, the student of Zen Buddhism, author and naturalist Peter Matthiessen accompanied the naturalist and writer George Schaller on a voyage of self-discovery to the remote region of Dolpo in Nepal. He wrote a book titled ‘The Snow Leopard’ describing his adventures and travels combining descriptions of nature with introspections of self-discovery. The book can serve to introduce a number of themes to medical students and other readers. Here I concentrate on disability, death, emigration of doctors from Nepal and other developing nations and the problem of infectious diseases.

In the ‘Westward’ section in which the author describes his journey to the town of Dhorpatan the following excerpt describes a crippled child negotiating the stone staircases of Nepal’s hill villages. He writes,

A child dragging bent useless legs is crawling up the hill outside the village. Nose to the stones, goat dung, and muddy trickles, she pulls herself along like a broken cricket. We falter, ashamed of our strong step, and noticing this, she gazes up, clear-eyed, without resentment – it seems much worse that she is pretty. (Matthiessen, 1978)

The author wants to give her something, perhaps a new life but is afraid to tamper with her natural dignity and only wishes her ‘Namaste’ (the Nepalese greeting delivered with the hands in the folded prayer position). He then goes on to describe the different reminders of death and disease which he had seen on this trek and how death and human suffering had caused Gautam Buddha, the founder of Buddhism to forsake a life of ease in search of enlightenment.

Disability is a major problem all over the world. The differently able have to face tremendous challenges and problems which are magnified in developing nations. Nepal is a small mountainous country in South Asia and disability especially problems with one’s legs and with movement impose a huge burden. Many mountain villages still lack roads and rough trails are the main paths interlinking villages and connecting them to roads where they exist. The differently able have a tough time negotiating these difficult paths and their lives are consequently very restricted. The author’s description of a child struggling up a trail using her hands can serve to vividly bring to students in Nepal and other countries the problems of

DOI: 10.4018/ijudh.2014010105

Copyright © 2014, IGI Global. Copying or distributing in print or electronic forms without written permission of IGI Global is prohibited.

www.igi-global.com/article/chronic-wound-characterization-using-bayesian-classifier-under-telemedicine-framework/144230?camid=4v1a