

Nepal doctor strike leaves thousands without care

January 20 2014, by Binaj Gurubacharya

A strike by doctors in Nepal left tens of thousands of patients with access only to emergency care Monday as physicians demanded sweeping changes to the country's medical education system.

The protesters say political appointees should not hold top positions at government hospitals; instead, they say, the schools must be entirely independent. The strike began Sunday and around 4,000 doctors are taking part, according to the Nepal Medical Association.

The strike caused major slowdowns at hospitals across Nepal, a poor country where people often travel [long distances](#) from rural areas to seek medical care.

"I have no idea what is going on or when I will get the treatment," said Suraj Biswokarma, 22, who lost his left arm in an accident and could barely speak because of the pain Monday. He traveled for days to reach Tribhuwan University Teaching Hospital in Katmandu after a local clinic in a village stabilized him.

"I arrived here in the hospital hoping to get some treatment," he said. "I have had only nurses take care of me since yesterday."

Other patients at Tribhuwan left without receiving any care. Those who were admitted before the strike began said doctors had stopped coming to treat them. The outpatient department was closed and only a few emergency patients arrived at the hospital.

Nepal has experienced doctor strikes before, even though they are illegal because hospitals offer essential services. The last strike was in August 2012 over the same issue and ended following government assurances of reform, but little has changed since then.

Protesters said they are trying to get the government's attention.

"We want the political parties and the government to stop interfering with the medical institutes and allow them to function independently," said Prabat Jha, one of hundreds of doctors who protested near Singhadurbar, which houses government ministries and offices.

He said the protesters support Govind K.C., a doctor who has been on a hunger [strike](#) for the past 10 days to demand the removal of the government-appointed head of Tribhuwan.

The protest was mostly peaceful, but police briefly detained about two dozen [doctors](#) and transported them in a truck back to the hospital.

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