

# MGH physicians write of their experiences in Nepal earthquake relief

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Two Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) physicians who participated in the international response to the major earthquakes that hit Nepal in April and May each describe their experiences in Perspectives articles receiving Online First publication today in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Renee Salas, MD, MS, was already in Nepal working at a Himalayan Rescue Association clinic in the remote village of Pheriche when the first 7.8 magnitude quake struck on April 25. As she describes in her article "Humanity, Teamwork and Art in Post-Earthquake Nepal," while the immediate impact on the village was primarily structural damage - only one individual sustained a minor injury - within several hours their clinic began receiving patients evacuated from Everest Base Camp, where a devastating avalanche killed at least 19 climbers and injured scores of others.

Salas describes how the clinic's small staff was soon supplemented by around 150 volunteers - only a few of whom had medical training - and noted that "the smooth collaboration of such a diverse international team in this small remote village was unlike anything I'd ever seen." She also describes how the subspecialty of wilderness medicine focuses on providing emergency medical care in limited-resource environments. Salas was treating patients and performing research in Nepal as part of the MGH Wilderness Medicine Fellowship and will be joining the Wilderness Medicine Division of the MGH Department of Emergency Medicine as faculty in July.

Annekathryn Goodman, MD, was part of the eight-person team assembled by the Office of Global Disaster Response in the MGH Center for Global Health that deployed on May 1 in response to a request from the International Medical Corps (IMC). The IMC team was joined by Salas and Lara Phillips, MD, who was also in Nepal on an MGH Wilderness Medicine fellowship when the earthquake struck. Goodman's article "The Mountains Are Angry" recounts her experiences in the region of Dhadhing and describes how the team was dropped by helicopter into remote villages where they camped and spent several days in each location, treating villagers and identifying those who needed to be evacuated to the capital of Kathmandu for more specialized treatment.

In describing the impact of the second major earthquake that struck on May 12 with a magnitude of 7.3, Goodman particularly notes the emotional devastation inflicted on some Nepali villagers. "To our Western sensibilities, earthquakes reflect the raw power and fickle unpredictability of our Earth," she writes. "In Nepal . . . many people sought a spiritual interpretation of their national cataclysm. Some Nepalis wondered whether the mountains were angry and the people were being punished." Goodman is a gynecologic oncologist in the MGH Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

Salas, Goodman and the other MGH members of the IMC-sponsored team returned to Boston on May 22, as did another six MGH health professionals participating in a Project Hope-sponsored team that had arrived in Nepal on May 8. Both teams were deployed through the Office of Global Disaster Response in the MGH Center for Global Health.

Provided by Massachusetts General Hospital

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