

## Medical Aid Project in West Nepal to Accompany the 2021 AACZ 125<sup>th</sup>-Anniversary Expedition

We would like to give this anniversary expedition a broader context beyond its primary scope, which is to climb mountains. This means returning more to the people living in the mountains than just the business transactions involved in our passing through. What these people need more than anything else is medical help, because the health services in the remote areas of far West Nepal still operate at the most basic level, lacking both infrastructure and qualified personnel. To help in this regard, we looked for a Nepali-driven non-profit medical organisation that is active in the mountain regions.



One of these is Ek Ek Paila (ekekpaila.org). Here you see their nice logo with a foot, illustrating the meaning of Ek Ek Paila – translatable as 'step by step' – which is also a play on the word *paila*, a medical camp.



Patients waiting for their assessments during a *paila* held in Gamghadi (Mugu District, West Nepal) in 2017.

This medical aid organisation was founded six years ago, after the devastating earthquake, by a group of Nepali doctors and their philanthropic friends with the aim of providing health services for the poor regions of the country. After the earthquake there was an immense need for medical help, and Ek Ek Paila organised several *pailas* as a highly effective and economic way to provide comprehensive medical services in these remote areas. At the moment these activities are shut down due to pandemic travel restrictions. However, on the 25th of April this year, Ek Ek Paila was able to open a community clinic in Kathmandu, which not only makes comprehensive medical services accessible to the growing numbers of needy city-dwellers (and transient workers) but also serves as a base of operations from which to coordinate national programmes. Ek Ek Paila has a broad base of friends and local partners helping them to raise funds and promote their projects. Thus we feel that they are best positioned to help us help the people of West Nepal.

**As a symbolic act linked to this 125th anniversary the AACZ, we would like to raise the funds to provide 125 cataract surgeries.** Why cataracts ? Because

- they are by far the number 1 cause of blindness in the Himalayan regions,
- they can be cured with a simple and standard operation and
- giving back the power of sight is truly life-changing for both the person and their community.



These operations will be carried out by Ek Ek Paila during their medical camps in West Nepal, as soon as the pandemic situation allows. **The cost of 1 cataract surgery is around 100 CHF, and each member of our expedition team will donate one operation. Next we appeal to other club members, families and friends for their support, in any amount, with the aim of providing a landmark contribution.**

On the next page is a collection of photographs taken during a cataract surgery camp held in Dho Tarap, Upper Dolpa, in September 2019. During this camp, a total of 40 patients underwent cataract

surgeries in two days, a very impressive number considering the minimal infrastructure. Away from cataracts, we are also organising equipment (portable instruments, supply and laboratory materials) and medicines for the other healthcare activities of Ek Ek Paila. A specific need in the mountain regions bordering Tibet is laboratory kits for detecting Hepatitis B virus infections, which are a rising problem there. **Even if you cannot donate as much as 100 CHF just now, Ek Ek Paila has many uses – in the prevention and treatment of standard conditions – for every penny they receive!**

At the moment, the 2nd COVID wave is still hitting Nepal very badly. We are in close contact with Ek



Ek Paila. They are running a hotline for COVID patients and distributing medicine (paracetamol, steroids, oral rehydration solutions) to support isolated households in remote districts in regions badly affected by the virus, and provided a photograph of these activities. For now they have assured us that they can handle the situation. While this can change at any time, they also emphasised again that, despite the terrible suffering caused by COVID, all other medical needs – which in the mountain regions include malnutrition, respiratory diseases, HBV, childbirth complications and of course cataracts – should not be forgotten.

**IMPORTANT: even if the expedition has to be postponed to 2022 because of the pandemic, we will still carry out this medical aid project in 2021 – now is truly the moment of greatest need for Ek Ek Paila’s work.**

**We thank you in advance for your support of the Nepalese people during this difficult time!**

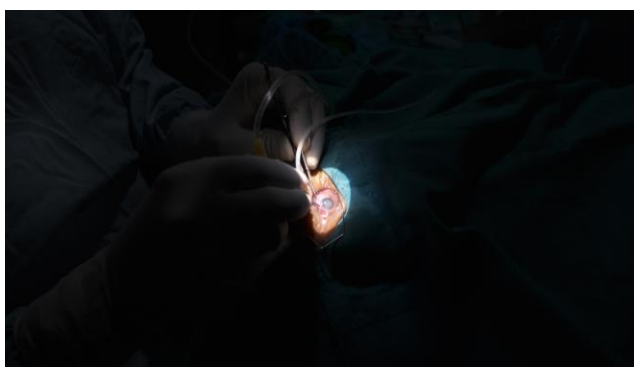
Zurich, July 2021, the AACZ expedition team



Outdoor assessment of visual acuity.



Waiting for the operation.



Advanced mature-white cataract, being replaced by intraocular lens.



Postoperative assessment.