

A Nepalese Patient Thanks NEBH for His New Life

As a severely handicapped child in Kathmandu, Nepal, Rajesh Shahi was destined to be an outcast. That was until New England Baptist Hospital changed his destiny. Sixteen years after Rajesh's 1993 surgery that fixed his kyphoscoliosis (severe curvature of the spine), Rajesh returned to the Hospital to express his gratitude for his new back – and his new life.

Rajesh's 1993 journey to the U.S. started with the help of an American nonprofit organization, Hands In

Outreach (HIO), which facilitated his treatment and studies in Nepal. Then 13 years old, Rajesh led a life of extreme poverty with his mother and six siblings. In Nepal, a caste system allows few opportunities for the poor and even fewer for the handicapped. Surgical treatment for Rajesh's curvature of the spine, which twisted his back both side to side and front to back, was not available in Nepalese medical facilities.

"His condition had gone untreated for so long; it was very, very severe," said Dr. Peter Anas, who assisted Dr. Alexander Wright in Rajesh's original 8-hour spinal fusion.

HIO requested assistance from Johanna Duponte, an occupational therapist, in finding orthopedic consultation and care for Rajesh. Duponte was turned down by several hospitals until Dr. Wright and NEBH agreed to perform Rajesh's surgery pro bono and Rajesh finally got the treatment he needed. After spending one week in the hospital, Rajesh was hosted for four months at the Duponte home. Rajesh's sixth grade classmates at Old Hammondtown School in Mattapoisett, Massachusetts learned firsthand about ethnic culture, poverty and kindness.

"I'm born in Nepal, but I got a rebirth in America," said Rajesh. "With the big support of New England Baptist Hospital, Father Wright, Peter Anas, the medical team, medical staff here. They all helped me." Rajesh calls Dr. Wright, who passed away in September 2006, his father. "I respect him as my own father, because he gave me a new life."

This kindness inspired Rajesh.



As a child, Rajesh had severe curvature of the spine.

"Everything comes down to love. Here, the people, they gave me love, this big support. It's really taught me," said Rajesh. "When I say thank you, I feel still that is not enough. I think still I have to prove it to them. I'm proving them by doing my work in Nepal."

After finishing his education, Rajesh worked for nine years to help street children in Kathmandu. In 2008, he founded Sanga-Sangai (sangasangai55@gmail.com), which means "together" in Nepali, to give Nepal's many impoverished children a better future. The nonprofit recently opened a library in a small village, and it also raises funds and organizes international volunteers for Nepalese nonprofits sharing its mission. Further information will soon be available at www.sangasangai.org.

The care Rajesh received from NEBH "really transformed his life, and it is also transforming the lives of many poor children in Nepal. It is wonderful to see the ripple effect of this act of kindness" said Duponte.

During this visit, Rajesh wanted to ease his fears that his back might deteriorate again. "There are many children behind me to whom I serve,"



Rajesh Shahi embraces the statue dedicated to Dr. Alexander Wright on his recent return to the Baptist.

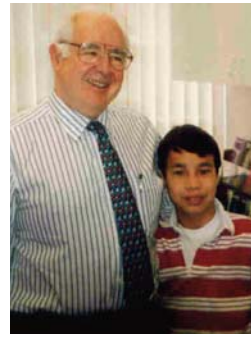
he said. "If I am not able physically to help myself, that means more than 200 children in Nepal will be unable to get my support."

Dr. Anas, who performed Rajesh's check-up, said an X-ray showed his back to be healthy.

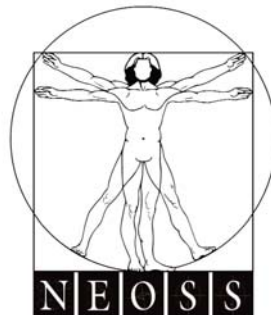
Rajesh is grateful for the assistance he received from NEBH and New England Orthopaedic and Spine Surgery (NEOSS), assistance that made it possible for him to return for a medical check up sixteen years later. Obtaining a visa to enter the U.S. was extremely difficult; the letters of support from Hospital administrators and from Dr. Anas and Dr. Parazin were critical. Robin Motyka, NEOSS's practice administrator, originally met Rajesh in 1993 and personally hosted Raj with her family this visit. Rajesh said that meeting Dr. Wright's wife, Marcia, and placing a Khata (Nepalese prayer flag) on the sculpture dedicated to Dr. Wright's memory was like thanking his father – something he has always longed to do.

"New England Baptist is everything for me," said Rajesh. "It gave me life. Without New England Baptist Hospital, I wouldn't be able to stand."

"It's so heartwarming to know what an impact it's been on his life," said Dr. Anas. "He's gone from being an outcast to being a productive teacher and a lovely human being. It's not just straightening out a spine; it's straightening out a life." ■



Clockwise from top left: Rajesh with his wife and daughter; a young Rajesh with Dr. Wright; Raj and the statue dedicated to Dr. Wright; with Dr. Peter Anas on his recent visit; with Jan Sliby, RN, Director of Guest Services at NEBH and Marcia Wright; with Rob Kenney, PA-C and Steve Parazin, MD; at Gillette Stadium; the opening of the new library in Nepal.



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