

news

B.C. nurse leads Red Cross unit to Nepal

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Disasters around the world have a way of landing on the doorstep of Patrice Gordon.

As a nurse practitioner and Red Cross volunteer, her job skills are often needed wherever people are overcoming severe adversity.

Such is the case this month as Gordon leads a 20-person Red Cross Emergency Response Unit, which includes West Kelowna city councillor Rosalind Neis, to the town of Vatunche in Nepal.

Since that country was rocked by an earthquake in April which killed more than 9,000, injured 23,000, and devastated the country's already fragile infrastructure, humanitarian efforts



Patrice Gordon is currently leading a Red Cross Emergency Response Unit to Nepal.

from around the world have descended on the country to restore health services and help start the long process to repair or replace what has been lost.

Gordon's group is the fifth unit rotation to land

in Nepal, largely there to help restore public health services, provide equipment and for local medical doctors and nurses and to help with the emotional after-shock of the earthquake.

For Gordon, a resident of Horn Lake in B.C.'s Chilcotin, the trip comes soon after her return from an Ebola treatment centre in Sierra Leone last year.

She came home with what she called "a bad cold," but was admitted to Kelowna General Hospital initially to ensure it wasn't actually symptoms of the virus. She tested negative for the highly contagious disease.

"It was a little bit overblown as I was pretty certain I just had a cold but it was a case of being sure that's all it was. My

cold went away but the publicity around that hung around for quite awhile," Gordon said.

Looking out from Vatunche, which is north of Kathmandu, Gordon said there is plenty of evidence to have a bleak attitude about the country's immediate future. She said the ravages of the earthquake that extends up the Langtang Valley close to the border with Tibet, are obvious.

"We are about 7,000 feet above sea level here and when you look up the Langtang Valley, it's one of the areas hardest hit by the earthquake, where so many villages were just flattened."

Making matters worse, the monsoon season has arrived and mountain passes are either impossible or extremely

hazardous to travel.

"This country had many needs prior to the earthquake and those needs have since been magnified. Now with the monsoons, access to food and water become enormous problems. If you look too broadly at what this country needs to recover, it will simply overwhelm you," she said.

So the focus of Gordon's emergency response unit is on the medical side for one village, working 15 to 16 hours shifts and putting up with living in large canvas tents that receive frequent visits from snakes, rats and leeches.

Gordon said her team is international with members from Canada, Japan, Australia, Mexico and Colombia. "I've been involved with other organizations but I am really proud to be part of the Red Cross and the work they do around the world."

"When you come home," Gordon said, "it does make you feel a little guilty when you see all that we have, and how the things we stress out about are so out of touch with what people in a country like Nepal have to deal with in their daily lives."

To donate to the Nepal relief effort visit the Red Cross website at redcross.ca.

OBWB wants mussel inspection stations

The Okanagan Basin Water Board is strengthening its case against invasive mussels.

Last week, directors upgraded their position on zebra and quagga mussels and the potential risk the species poses to Okanagan waterways.

"We are trying to put pressure on the provincial government to do more and have five inspection stations," said director Juliette Cunningham.

"There is a cost if we don't stop (mussels) from arriving here."

It's believed the annual impact to government, businesses and residents could be more than \$43 million if the mussels take hold in local lakes.

"This scenario has played out across watersheds throughout North America, where ecosystems and local economies have been drastically altered by these invaders," states OBWB's position statement.

Zebra and quagga mussels are native to eastern Europe and have spread across North America since the 1980s. They clog water intake pipes, pumps and boat motors. They also deplete food sources for fish and produce toxins that kill fish and birds and contaminate drinking water.

As part of the changes to the position statement, the board is calling on the provincial government to fund permanent, mandatory inspection stations for boats at the five major crossings between B.C. and Alberta.

In March, Victoria announced three mobile stations.

"OBWB strongly urges the provincial government to consider the cost to the province and local governments for the long-term treatment, mitigation or control of zebra or quagga mussels if the province fails to enact appropriate prevention measures and consequently the species are introduced," says the position statement.

"We call on the province to commit to funding all treatment and containment programs in infested waters should an invasion occur."

While the government may be concerned about the cost of running monitoring stations, Cunningham says the budget could come from a boater-pay sticker program, similar to those in the U.S.

"Those with watercraft pay and it seems effective.

I'm not sure why the province is reluctant to look at that," she said. OBWB also wants water utilities to review what upgrades and maintenance measures will be needed if the mussels arrive and ways to prevent service interruptions.

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Duane English & Wesla Wong
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