

APNA visits the earthquake zone in Pakistan

In the last issue we reported on the All Pakistan Nurses Association (APNA) commemoration of Pakistan's earthquake victims. Here, Muhammad Asghar, ICU nurse at Whipps Cross Hospital, describes a visit to the earthquake areas.

LAST OCTOBER the earthquake destroyed about 80,000 lives and left countless people homeless. Not only was the population of Pakistan devastated by the earthquake, the whole world was overwhelmed.

I responded to a call from the President of APNA, who was going to the disaster-hit areas to help. I decided to join him in November – I felt it was my moral duty. Farzana Adam, another nurse from the UK, also volunteered to work for the earthquake victims. On our first day, we took Farzana on a tour of local hospitals in Islamabad, which was less affected by the tragedy, to gain an insight into the health care system of Pakistan.

After that we visited INOR (Institute of Nuclear Medicine Oncology & Radiology). The hospital specialises in treating cancer patients, but was treating earthquake victims, mainly orthopaedic patients. It was originally designed with only 10 beds, but arrangements were made to accommodate 20-30 patients. We were given a very warm welcome by the orthopaedic team: Dr Amjad Gulzar, Dr Steve Manian (UK-based orthopaedic surgeons), Dr Noel and Dr Alexis from Cuba, who had all volunteered to help earthquake victims.

The operating theatre was cluttered and dirty. Aseptic procedures were almost non-existent. We helped change the environment of the wards, using our experience from UK hospitals. Farzana took responsibility for the female side of the ward and I looked after the male patients.

Reflecting on my experience, I feel so proud of what did. As a Pakistani nurse myself, I'd like to thank my colleagues in ICU at Whipps Cross for helping me. The infection control principles I learned helped me in making the ward and the theatre safer places.

■ Log on to the RCN London web pages at www.rcn.org.uk/london to read this fascinating article in full.