

The LHF: committed to the prevention of cardiovascular diseases.

The Ladakh Heart Foundation is a non-profit, non-political organisation which was formed and registered under the J&K Government Registration and Societies Act on the 20th February 1997. Ladakh is one of the largest districts in the Indian Himalayas, lying at an altitude of 3/3500m. The high altitude, extremely cold environment and difficult living conditions result in a high incidence of congenital and acquired heart disease, as well as causing a high prevalence of respiratory problems. Since it was established three years ago the Foundation and all those involved have worked hard to help the people of Ladakh in teaching them more about the risks of heart disease, and in raising money to improve Ladakh's facilities for the treatment of such conditions. Here are several accounts of what the Ladakh Heart Foundation has undertaken and achieved over the last three years...

Preventative Intervention:

Before the establishment of the Ladakh Heart Foundation in 1997, there was a high prevalence of Acquired Rheumatic Fever in Ladakh. The reason for this is that during the extremely cold winter months (which can drop to below 30), local families spend most of their time together in the traditional kitchen. This close proximity to each other exposes young children to cross infection with streptococcal throat infections, which may develop into Acquired Rheumatic Fever, and possibly Rheumatic Heart Disease with severe consequences later in life.

In response to this problem the Ladakh Heart Foundation, in association with the Lions Club Leh and the District Health Services, initiated the "primary prevention of ARF" scheme. This entails any child aged between five and fifteen with possible streptococcal throat infection, receiving a single shot of Benzathene Penicillin after a proper sensitivity test, so that the infection doesn't develop into ARF. Thanks to this scheme the instance of Acquired Rheumatic Fever, Acute Rheumatic Fever and Rheumatic Heart Disease has dropped since 1997.

Leh world anti-smoking day:

On May 31st 1998 the Ladakh Heart Foundation in collaboration with the Ladakh Health Department organised an anti smoking march. Children from local private and government schools marched in procession through Leh, carrying banners warning people of the dangers involved in smoking and asking them to give up. The procession began from Lah Chowk Leh and was flagged off by the Deputy Commissioner of Leh, Mr R.K. Goyal. The Deputy Commissioner himself also appealed to people to stop smoking as it is one of the major causes of heart disease and cancer. The event was reported on in the Daily Excelsior newspaper the next day.

Extending health care to some of the more remote villages:

The LHF runs a series of medical camps when they travel to some of the more remote villages of Ladakh, with local doctors and sometimes foreign volunteer doctors. On these camps, the Foundation carries out general health checks such as measuring blood pressure as well more specific health checks such as ECG readings and monitoring people's breathing capacities. The doctors working in association with the Heart Foundation are able to diagnose many new cases of heart disease on these camps. Another purpose of the medical camps is to educate local people about the symptoms and possible preventative measures associated with heart disease. The Ladakh Heart Foundation doctors also give talks teaching the locals about the risks associated with poor diet, obesity, smoking and excessive alcohol consumption and the effects such habits may have on their cardiovascular system. These medical camps provide a very important service by taking health care and education to villagers and nomads who would otherwise have very limited health facilities, if any. Thanks to the time and effort put in by local doctors, foreign doctors and other members of the Heart Foundation, a total 20 medical and educational camps have taken place in the past years. As a result of all these camps over 2000 people have been examined. The Heart Foundation at present has 66 registered cases of Congenital Heart Disease, 14 cases of Acquired Rheumatic Fever patients, 14 cases of Coronary Heart Disease and 108 cases of Rheumatic Heart Disease; the Heart Foundation keeps detailed case histories of all these patients. As a result of its medical camps the Heart Foundation is able to run checks on its current patients, and to diagnoses new cases of heart disease thus helping local people further.

Date	Village	Distance from Leh in km	Description of camp	No of patients examined
11/10/97	Spituk & Saboo Chuchot	7 km	Health education programme	N/A
20/06/98	Umla	28 km	Health education & patient examinations	31
12/10/98	Hanley Khaldo	301km	Health education & patient examinations	57
13/10/99	Hanley Pungos	302km	Health education & patient examinations	96
11/04/99	Fiang	30 km	Health education & patient examinations	61
21/05/00	Matho	25 km	Health education & patient examinations	136
28/5/00	Stok	16 km	Health education & patient examinations	120
04/07/00	Korzok Gompa	216 km	Health education & patient	63

Date	Village	Distance from Leh in km	Description of camp	No of patients examined
05/07/00	Korzok Gumpa & Paldol Korzok	216 km	examinations Health education & patient examinations	93
06/07/00	Tibetan refugees at Thachung Kuru	200 km	Health education & patient examinations	60
08/07/00	Chumathang	150 km	Health education & patient examinations	76
23/07/00	Phey	10 km	Health education & patient examinations	75
24/07/00	Tibetan refugees Camp at choglamsar	7 km	Health education & patient examinations	116
11/09/00	S.N.M.	Leh town	Heart patient examination	250
12/09/00	Hospital			
13/09/00	Leh			
14/09/00				
17/09/00	International Seminar on Health and Environment of Ladakh Organised by Ladakh Heart foundation Tibetan Environment Network	8 km	17 Scholars	450
18/09/00		H.H. Dalai Lama	400 Schools	
19/09/00		Photang Givetsal	students and	
20/09/00		In Choglamsar	Government officer Doctors Non Govt NGO Tibetans Ladakhi Public	

Details of the medical camps running between October 1997 and July 2000

Visit from AIIMS doctor from New Delhi:

In August 1998 the Ladakh Heart Foundation invited Dr Sampath Kumar, a senior cardio-thoracic surgeon from AIIMS, New Delhi. At this time the LHF had 85 rheumatic heart disease patients, each patient with a detailed case history for periodic check up, referral management, financial and rehabilitation purposes. Dr Sampath Kumar examined all these patients, here in Leh so they didn't have to travel to Delhi, and advised appropriate management. He strongly recommended the Foundation acquire a state of the art Colour Doppler Imaging system to facilitate the diagnostic capability of local physicians. This would be a big step forward for the Heart Foundation, as the local

diagnosis of our patients would curtail the costs of visits to Delhi for initial diagnosis and subsequent follow ups if required. Following this advice the Heart Foundation is currently trying to get hold of such a machine.

Plans for the future:

The costs for cardio-thoracic surgery are prohibitively expensive for the majority of the Heart Foundation's patients. The cost of surgery required to treat rheumatic heart disease ranges from Rs. 91,500 for one valve to Rs. 142,000 for two valve surgery. Congenital heart disease is also in high prevalence in Ladakh. The average cost of surgery to treat Congenital Heart Disease is Rs. 45,000. These prices are exclusive of costly travel expenses and accommodation charges for the patient and attendant in Delhi. When possible the LHF is committed to help raise money for its poorer patients so that they can afford the surgery they require. In 1998 the Foundation was able to donate Rs. 85,000 each to two very poor Rheumatic Heart Disease patients in need of two valve surgery, to contribute to the cost of their treatment. Some of this money was acquired from the donations of local people through "16 Friends", a Ladakhi organisation which the Heart Foundation had spoken to in order to get them to persuade local people to donate money to help these patients. Another welfare organisation based in Leh, the Otzer Tsogspa Skyanos Gogsum Association, organised a concert, the proceeds of which, over Rs. 40,000, were donated to the LHF so that these patients may be helped. The Heart Foundation tries to contribute to the surgery of other patients; the amount they receive depends on their condition and their financial situation. The Ladakh Heart Foundation is currently raising money to build its own diagnostic centre in Leh, land for this project has been kindly donated to us by the J&K government and the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council. The centre is to have a diagnostic wing, an operating theatre and a conference hall which will be used for preventative health seminars and training of local health workers which is an essential part of the Foundation's work. This centre will allow patients not requiring open heart surgery (such as Congenital Heart Disease patients), to be operated on in Leh, thus curtailing their costs greatly. More invasive surgery, such as that required for people suffering from Rheumatic Heart Disease, will still have to be carried out in Delhi as the procedure requires a lot of sophisticated equipment which the Heart Foundation does not have. However as a result of the Foundations scheme to prevent acquired rheumatic fever by giving children shots of Penicillin, the instance of rheumatic heart disease and subsequently the number of patients requiring treatment for this condition are falling. Once the diagnostic centre is built, cardio-thoracic surgeons from AIIMS in New Delhi have pledged to visit the Heart Foundation for one week every year to operate on patients in Leh voluntarily.

The Ladakh Heart Foundation was founded in 1997 by Ven Thubstan Chogyal. He was ordained in 1977 at the age of seven. Chogyal studied at Drebung Loseling College in South India and spent seven years at the Tantric College of HH the Dalai Lama at Namgyal Monastery. After three years in South Korea, where he learnt Korean, he spent seven months studying English in Oxford. Now he has decided to dedicate his life to finding solutions to the problems facing his people. For any extra information on the Ladakh Heart Foundation please write to us: Ladakh Heart Foundation, PO BOX 150, Pologround, Leh 194 101, Ladakh, India. Tel: 91 1982 53291

