

The Pakistan Project

by the Swiss Pakistan Society (Swiss-Pak) and the Swiss Paraplegics Centre (SPC)

Introduction:

After the devastating earthquake of Oct. 2005 there are still many severely injured and disabled patients in various hospitals of Pakistan. Many of them suffer from Spinal Cord Injury due to fractures of the spine and are not rehabilitated and reintegrated into society. These patients are a heavy burden on the health system of Pakistan because they still occupy a lot of beds needed for other patients.

Prof. Max Aebi (Berne, Switzerland) and Dr. Muhammad Asad Kureshi (Rawalpindi, Pakistan) have begun to correct the spines of many of these patients by orthopaedic interventions (surgery) to facilitate pain-free sitting in a wheelchair. This is the primary condition for medical, social and vocational rehabilitation.

Investigations of the Commander of the Armed Forces Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine (AFIRM) in Rawalpindi, Dr. Akhtar Waheed, have shown that there are only 17 physicians with special education in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation in Pakistan. Half of them are working in private Hospitals and the rest is employed by the army. Rehabilitation of Spinal Cord Injured Patients is in fact almost unknown in Pakistan.

Training of Rehabilitation Medicine Doctors in Switzerland:

In a first step the Swiss Pakistan Society and the Swiss Paraplegics Centre Nottwil have provided a special "Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Course" for 7 Pakistani physicians in two groups. (4th Apr. - 8th Jun. and 22. Oct to 14. Dec. 2007)

They actively participated in the management of paraplegic and tetraplegic patients as well as in the clinical and radiological conferences. They were involved in neurology, electro-diagnosis, botox injections, functional electro stimulation, pain management, orthopaedic assessment, urodynamic procedures and intensive care management.

A special focus was given in the assessment and treatment of respiratory problems in spinal cord patients. They participated in plastic surgery ward rounds, surgical procedures and multi-disciplinary conferences for assessment of wheelchairs, orthoses, prostheses and other orthopaedic aids for paraplegic patients.

All participants had a comprehensive introduction into physiotherapy, ergotherapy and nursing of spinal cord patients and were able to take part in various activities of these departments. By this special course fundamental instruction of interested and motivated rehabilitation specialists has been established. They will be able to train other doctors in Pakistan and propagate the acquired knowledge.

Training of Rehabilitation Medicine Teams in Pakistan:

Rehabilitation of wheelchair patients is not a task for physicians alone, it is teamwork. That's why we have seen the need of instructing also other professionals, namely nurses, physiotherapists and occupational therapists of Pakistan. To minimize the costs and to maximize the effect it is easier to realise this instruction in Pakistan instead of inviting all these persons to Switzerland.

We made a first attempt in January 2007 by sending a Swiss team to Pakistan. From 12th - 14th Jan. 2007 the team participated in an "International Conference on Disaster Management" in

Islamabad and from 15th Jan - 2nd Feb. 2007 it gave courses on SCI Rehabilitation. The Swiss team included two nurses, a physiotherapist, an occupational therapist and a physician. During 4 weeks course the Swiss team instructed the local staff from different hospitals as well as from the AFIRM Institute. The reactions on this event have been positive for both sides.



Impressions of the first SCI Rehabilitation Course in the AFIRM in January 2007

We now would like to support the education and training of further medical professionals in Pakistan to assist the already trained Pakistani rehabilitation specialists. A new team from the Swiss Paraplegics Centre Nottwil and the SUVA Rehabilitation Clinic in Bellikon plans to go for another instructional tour to Pakistan.

We are convinced, that the knowledge transfer Switzerland-Pakistan can help the remaining disabled victims of the earthquake as well as people with a freshly injured spinal cord to achieve higher levels of rehabilitation and also reintegration into society. On the other hand this will relieve the heavy load of long time nursing of these patients from the health system of Pakistan.