



ROKPA TIMES



**More power to
the people through
improved health**

Editorial



Dear ROKPA friends, Sir and Madam,

It is some years ago that I last had to go to hospital. I had badly broken my leg after slipping on an ice plate in the mountains. All I remember of the relatively short time in hospital was my snoring room-mate and that I was always served good food, three times a day.

Nobody likes being in hospital. But apart from some minor or heavier pain we suffer in such circumstances, we generally feel well looked after and have great confidence in the doctors and the nurses. They take better care of our health than we sometimes do ourselves.

Unfortunately, people in the Tibetan regions of China experience very different conditions.

During my project trip last November I visited some patients in hospitals, as I do every year. Since they are not fed, they need to have a family member with them all the time to do the cooking. Apart from that, many of the elderly Tibetans do not speak Chinese and need a translator to be able to communicate with the doctors.

I remember particularly well the picture of an elderly woman who would not leave the side of her very ill adult daughter. She showed me where she slept: On a mat full of holes on the floor of the hospital corridor, just outside the public toilets, where the cold winter air was entering through the poorly insulated windows. She had been living like that for months, day and night in the hospital, driven by the hope for her daughter's recovery.

It is with your support that ROKPA can provide medical emergency aid and assist many people in their dire need.

As long as for those supported by us, a snoring room-mate is not greatest problem, as long as that we have not done our job.

With our sincerest thankfulness for your generosity and warm greetings and the best wishes for you!

Sincerely yours,

Lea Wyler
Founder and Vice President of ROKPA



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Masthead

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Health – a valuable property

An introduction to the topic by Dr. med. Felix Gutzwiller, preventive medicine specialist and member of the ROKPA Patrons.

Every person has a right to the maximum level of health attainable. The prerequisites are access to medical care, clean drinking water and sanitation as well as food providing all necessary nutrients. As self-evident as this may seem to us, for millions of people, health is an unattainable goal. To this day, many people still die of treatable diseases.

There is a huge gap between our high tech medicine and the financial options of the needy in underdeveloped countries or regions. Expensive medical treatments well known to us are not available in the remote areas of the Himalayas.

There is a close relationship between poverty and health in a population. The poor in Asia or Africa are more prone to catch diseases, and once such a disease has broken out, its effects are all the worse: A serious illness poses a threat to the entire family since there is no health insurance or means of financial support such as sickness benefit insurance. It is the family that bears the financial burden of the medical treatment and the loss of income. Thus, an illness exacerbates poverty.

Some of the aid agencies contribute significantly to the provision of health care. ROKPA is a good example of such efficient support. With their projects, ROKPA has improved basic healthcare for the poor. Equipment and well-trained physicians are provided for doctors' offices in the remote areas of the Himalayan region, medicine and surgery are sponsored. For talented students, scholarships are available, so that they can study Tibetan medicine. After completing their studies, they return

to their home villages to provide medical services for the local population. This is the foundation for their own health care system. In addition, ROKPA provides medical emergency aid at short notice, and can thereby save lives.

Many illnesses may be prevented or their seriousness may be lowered. This can be achieved by educating people and promoting an exchange between the (poor) population and medical experts. Meeting as equals, ensures that the information is given in an easily understandable way so that it can lead to the behavioral changes aimed for. This allows for early detection of diseases and an early and easy treatment. Education is an important prevention

strategy. Health and education are interrelated. Education is an investment in health since it reduces poverty risk. Health is a prerequisite for being able to learn to perform and to make full use of one's resources. Thus, to invest in education equals promoting health.

Health indicators of Switzerland and the ROKPA focus countries

	Switzerland	Nepal	Tibetan areas of China	Zimbabwe
1 physician per x inhabitants	245	4,762	15,000	16,667
life expectancy	82.5	67.5	67	57
infant mortality per 1000 births	3.7	39	k.A.	26
underweight in children under 5 years	0%	29%	k.A.	11%
most frequent health problems	Cardio-vascular diseases, cancer, dementia	Hepatitis A, gastro-intestinal diseases, leprosy, tuberculosis	Hepatitis A & B, tuberculosis, gastro-intestinal diseases, rheumatism	Malaria, HIV, hepatitis A, cholera, tuberculosis

Source: The World Factbook, as of February 2016



At the heart of Tibetan medicine: medicinal plants

Local medicinal plants constitute the centerpiece of Traditional Tibetan Medicine (TTM). However, as a result of the overexploitation of these plants, the population is losing this basis for easily accessible and cost-effective health care. ROKPA protects these valuable plants by replanting them gradually, and uses them to produce herbal medicine.

For the local population, TTM – one of the oldest medical systems in the world – is a priceless asset. Hospitals in remote mountain regions tend to be poorly equipped. For the needy, TTM often is the only hope for recovery. Next to pulse and tongue diagnosis, medicinal plants constitute the centerpiece of TTM. For their own resistance against the inhospitable conditions and natural enemies wanting to eat them, these medicinal

plants over millions of years have developed protective substances which are used to the benefit of humans in various pharmaceutical formulations. However, due to overexploitation and unsustainable harvesting methods, many of these medicinal plants have become extinct or are in danger of dying out. Since 2008, ROKPA has been cultivating and reintroducing these medicinal plants and other useful plants in TTM step by step. For that purpose, fields at different altitudes and greenhouses are used. The cultivation of the plants is very challenging for the project managers. Not all medicinal plants can be successfully grown under these harsh climatic conditions.

Since the start of the project, 24 medicinal plants have been cultivated successfully. Apart from the medicinal plants various crop plants have been planted on the remaining surfaces. After only a few years, some of the cultivated plants may now be added to the pharmaceutical formulations. In recent times, Maca – a foodstuff rich in nutrients and vital elements – has also been cultivated. The income generated by the project can then be re-invested into the project.

Tibetan gold

■ The caterpillar fungus (tib. yartsa gunbu) grows exclusively in the Tibetan highlands and in the surrounding Himalayan region. Locally, the caterpillar fungus has long been recognized as a healing mushroom with excellent healing power. For some years now, demand for the caterpillar fungus on the Asian market has enjoyed great growth. It is valued as a status symbol and is said to have aphrodisiac powers. Its value increased almost ten-fold over the past 15 years – in 2011, 100 g were available at some \$ 5,800 / EUR 5,300 / £ 4,000 (source: national Geographic, 2011), today the price is slightly below that. The fungus cannot be cultivated, which is another reason why it is good money for those collecting it in the wild. For many Tibetans, it is an additional and often only source of income – sometimes to the benefit of entire village communities.

A three day walk to the next hospital

How long does it take you to get to the nearest hospital in case of emergency? Probably less than three days, which is better than what the nuns of the KepchaGön monastery and the Tibetan nomads of the surrounding areas had to face until recently. ROKPA donations helped pay for an ambulance last year which will help reduce travel time significantly.

The 300 nuns at the KepchaGön monastery live about 4,000 metres (appr. 13,000 ft.) above sea level. Dr Ani Yeshe is responsible for the health care of these nuns and the people living in the area around the monastery. The 51-year-old has been practicing Tibetan medicine for over 30 years. Just like most older doctors in the Tibetan areas of China she didn't receive a formal education but has acquired her medical knowledge from her predecessor and other health practitioners.

Ani Yeshe runs an outpatient clinic at the monastery where she treats patients at up to 9,000 office visits per year, the majority of them being women and children. She works there seven days a week. Other than the traditional pulse diagnosis, all she has is a blood pressure

device and a stethoscope for her exams. The most common conditions she has to treat are tuberculosis, arthritis, GI issues and high blood pressure.

The next hospital is about 120 km (75 miles) away from the small clinic at KepchaGön monastery. It is not uncommon for severely ill or injured patients to come to the clinic who then have to be taken to the hospital as soon as possible. A few years ago a nun came in with appendicitis; since there was no car, the transport took three days before she finally had an emergency surgery at the hospital. Another nun died because taking her to the hospital was impossible.



Dr. Ani Yeshe feels the pulse of an elderly nun in Kepcha - the patient is 89 years old and has been at the monastery for 70 years.

In 2015, ROKPA managed to raise the money for an ambulance for the monastery clinic through donations. The roads are in bad shape - the trip is still four hours long because drivers cannot go faster than 30 km/h (20 mph) due to pot holes and uneven surfaces. Dr Ani Yeshe is still thrilled about the new car: it will save lives!

She can also use the vehicle for her office to gather a supply of Tibetan medicinal herbs, which run out every other month. She picks them herself in the mountains during the summer. Because the plants grow at very different altitudes and on different mountains, Ani Yeshe can gather them much faster now that she has a car.



The nuns of Kepcha thank our donors for their support.

Medical emergency support

Emergencies require fast action: only a few weeks, days, or sometimes even hours determine whether or not a patient will survive and has a decent chance of recovery. This is where ROKPA helps quickly and bypasses potential red tape through our medical emergency fund.



Dhonchu, a mother of three, has cancer and is in dire need of surgery. Her husband having passed away some time ago, she is all alone with her children. Her husband's brother, the monk ChimeWangyal, had been taking care of her and her children ever since. But on

October 8, 2013 he fell victim to a violent crime in Chengdu, an incident which also killed ROKPA founder Dr Akong Tulku Rinpoche.

Since this tragedy ROKPA has been paying for the children's tuition because the family lives in abject poverty. Obviously, the mother's illness is particularly hard on the family. Apart from the fact that she does not have the money to pay for the surgery, Dhonchu refuses to go the hospital: she doesn't have anyone to watch her children. Since her stay at the hospital will probably be a longer one, not only does she need money for the treatment but also for child care. Only with support from others will she be able to afford the medical care without which she may not survive. ROKPA has already paid for part of the surgery. However, childcare cost adds up to USD 700 / EUR 650 / £ 500 per month.



Sonam Dorje is an eight-year-old boy from Nangchen who is suffering from leukemia. He has been living at the far away hospital of Guangzhe which specialises in cancer in children. His treatment consists of a variety of medications and infusions and is fairly expensive.

In order to pay for what has already added up to \$ 60,000 / EUR 55,000 / £ 43,000 in medical bills, Sonam Dorje's parents have sold their car, their motorcycle and all of their jewellery. The extended family, too, has come together to help with the costs.

Although Sonam Dorje is currently doing better, he will have to be treated at the hospital for another two years in order to fully recover. His parents are no longer able to pay for his care. ROKPA has been supporting them since last year, so little Sonam Dorje can get better.

Distribution of healthcare costs in China

■ There is no health insurance comparable to Western models in China. However, today the Chinese government does pay 60% of medical costs but only if the hospital is located in the same province as the patient's residence. In the Tibetan regions of China, where population density is very

low, hospitals are far from being equipped for all medical conditions. This is why Sonam Dorje, who suffers from leukemia (see above), had to be transferred to a specialized hospital in another province, and his parents have to pay for the entire treatment themselves.

Please make your donations under the subject line "Medical emergency support Tibet". Thank you very much!

Our bank account:

IBAN CH73 0483 5045 5090 1100 1
Credit Suisse, 8070 Zurich



A fight for survival

It is a safe haven for those who are at the end of their rope: the ROKPA Drop-In Centre in Zimbabwe's capital Harare. Here, by simple means we can make a difference in many people's lives.

The ROKPA Drop-In Centre in Harare is open to people with all kinds of problems. Most of them need medical help or food. But we've also been asked to help in other ways: one person didn't have the money for a bus ticket home, another needed help with the organization of a funeral. We help as our resources allow us. In many cases, simply listening to people and taking their concerns seriously makes a difference.

The main focus is on medical assistance. Most people in Zimbabwe can't afford medication or visits to the doctor's office. At our facility they receive both for free, thanks to our cooperation with a local

physician and a pharmacy downtown. Since there are only a few offers like this, the demand is high.

Due to a drop in donations many NGOs have gone out of business in the past two years. At the same time, health care costs have skyrocketed and are now among the highest on the entire continent. Because of the economic situation about 80% of people in Zimbabwe are unemployed. All these factors lead more and more extremely poor people to our doorstep where they desperately ask for our help.

■ Donations needed more than ever

Due to the disastrous economic situation in Zimbabwe ROKPA workers on site have an increasingly difficult time raising money among local donors for our aid projects. This is especially devastating with regard to a growing number of people asking for our help.

Please make your donation now under the subject line "Drop-In Zimbabwe" to help these people in abject poverty. Your contribution is much appreciated!

Our bank account:

IBAN
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Credit Suisse, 8070 Zurich

Kuda's story

Kuda is a five-year-old boy who has been suffering from Xeroderma pigmentosum, a rare form of skin cancer, since he was two years old. Together with his parents and three siblings he lives in a suburb of Harare. The parents have taken him to the hospital many times but they don't have the money for the highly recommended

surgery. At one of these visits Kuda's mother heard of ROKPA through another patient.

Through ROKPA donations Kuda's family was able to pay for the surgery and the boy is currently doing well. However, as there is no cure for the disease at present, it is only a matter of time before Kuda's family will need help again.



Kuda after his operation which was paid for with ROKPA donations.



First aid after the earthquake

Emergency medical aid after the earthquake in Nepal: Adina Tschuppert, a nurse from Zurich, helped to deliver first aid in the disaster-stricken area as a ROKPA volunteer. In her report, she gives an insight into the missions undertaken by ROKPA's Task Force, which involved providing medical care for hundreds of people in the first few weeks after the earthquake.

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We had been driving for hours along the bumpy roads through the hills of Nepal. We (two ROKPA children Krishna Hari (18) and Prakash (17), ROKPA project coordinator Tal, our driver and me) had loaded every inch of the red pickup with enormous jute sacks full of rice, dal and medical equipment.

Our car repeatedly got stuck in large potholes, but each time we managed between us to push it back out and drive on. On many occasions, we were only able to do this with the help of the villagers we found sitting by the roadside next to houses that had been completely destroyed. They lent a willing hand without needing to be asked.

We finally stopped at a mountain village, shouldered our packs, which were full to the brim with medical supplies, and walked over to the spot where many people had already gathered. We had told the locals about our planned visit the night before when they rang to ask for help.

Krishna Hari and Prakash interpreted for me and Tal. They got quickly organised and were brilliant. They used writing pads to note down the name, date of birth and main symptoms of those who needed help and then brought the information over to us. That meant we could work incredibly efficiently.

The most common problems were eye irritation caused by the dust, hand and foot injuries and dehydration.

After a while I noticed a man carrying a little girl in his arms. The child had a crusted wound on her forehead that was matted with dirt and hair and looked filthy. I asked the man to come over so that I could look at her.

She remained completely still and quiet as I cleaned the wound with a solution of cooking salt and compresses. The wound did not appear to be deep, more a superficial abrasion. Her father told me she had been buried for several hours under the rubble until he finally managed to dig her out with his bare hands.

I asked the man a few more questions and conducted various minor tests on his daughter. I was pretty sure that she had not just suffered a shock but probably other head injuries as well. We drove them to the nearest hospital. Relieved that our little patient was now being well looked after, we began the long journey back to the ROKPA children's home. To this day I still wonder from time to time how little Karishma is doing.





Waiting is not an option

An update from Tal Siano, ROKPA project coordinator in Nepal.

Almost a year has passed since the earthquake, and many people are still living in temporary shelters and tents. Imports from India have been blocked because of the difficult political situation, and both fuel and gas are in short supply – in a country where public transport and electricity supplies were already very unreliable.

ROKPA's street kitchen opened a month earlier than usual in the winter of 2015/2016, and we are feeding many more people than in previous years. We have to burn wood for cooking instead of using gas.

That means the wood has to be chopped and creates a lot more work for the volunteers.

The lack of resources is making the task of reconstruction much harder. ROKPA has been in Nepal for decades and is familiar with the needs of local people and the often difficult conditions. So we know how to use the resources we have efficiently, by setting priorities and planning well ahead. For the people of Nepal, simply watching and waiting means losing the last remaining scrap of hope. For us that is not an option, and that is why we continue to push ahead with our projects as far as we are able.



Tal Siano providing medical care after the earthquake

School partially destroyed in Himalayan foothills

The school lies in the remote mountainous district of Jiri, around ten hours by bus from Kathmandu. Two of its five buildings were completely destroyed by the earthquake and another badly damaged. The school has 236 pupils between the ages of 5 and 16, and teaching ranges from nursery school to secondary school. At present, the children are taught by ten staff in

temporary and very tiny wooden huts. ROKPA is helping to fund the reconstruction project in close collaboration with local people and with the support of two volunteers, an architect from South Africa and a draughtsman from Australia.



Watch a short video clip about the project with Tal Siano.



Entire sections of the school buildings (situated at 2,100 m above sea level) collapsed during the earthquake.

Construction work begins on the Akong Rinpoche Memorial Centre

Building work on the Akong Rinpoche Memorial Centre in Boudha, Kathmandu began on 4 January 2016 with the first ceremonial spadeful of earth. As well as housing the planned hotel management training school for young people from the Children's Home and others from the poorest families in the area, it will be used to strengthen ROKPA's social business projects. These include the ROKPA Women's Workshop and the

ROKPA Guest House, both of which are being expanded. That will enable us to offer even more people an income and to generate additional revenue for ROKPA that we can use to help secure the long-term future of the Children's Home. The first phase, which involves digging the foundations, is currently in progress. We expect to inaugurate the new building at the end of 2017.



■ We need your help in order to fund this project. Please mark your donations "New building project Kathmandu". Thank you.

Our bank account details:

IBAN
CH73 0483 5045 5090 1100 1
Credit Suisse, 8070 Zurich

Using donations efficiently. A challenge we face every day

For our office in Zurich, maximizing the use of our available resources while giving the utmost priority to the prudent handling of the donation money entrusted to us is a daily challenge. Reaching this goal not only demands that we operate efficiently, but, first and foremost, means that we need a knowledgeable and dedicated team, along with reliable partners in the countries we are working in.

Our employees are supported by a host of qualified volunteers who are skilled in a wide range of fields and carry out crucial tasks in every area of our daily operations. They work in accounting and communications, maintain our databases, take care of general administrative tasks, provide IT support, and even customize new solutions in line with our specific requirements. Their contribution is of the utmost

importance, enabling us to be as effective as possible in fulfilling our responsibility: the long-term support of thousands of people in need.

We need volunteers!

**Would you like to use your know-how to support ROKPA?
We are constantly looking for new volunteers.**

You'll find all the areas of expertise we currently need listed on our website, www.rokpa.org, under **Who we are > ROKPA Switzerland > Volunteering**.

Alternatively, this link will take you straight to that page:

www.rokpa.org/en/who-we-are/rokpa-switzerland/volunteering.html

Please don't forget to tell us your new address!

**Have you recently moved?
Or are you about to move?**

Please let us know well in advance – it helps us avoid additional expenses.

Thank you very much!

I work for ROKPA ...

"ROKPA needs a new address database," a good friend of mine, who has been a volunteer for ROKPA since 2014, said to me. "That'd be something you could do." I was looking for a new job at the time and had some experience in creating databases. Writing IT programs for a good cause? Now, that was an idea that appealed to me instantly and, after giving it a go for a day, when I was welcomed warmly by employees and volunteers, there I was, already involved in the planning and implementation process.

In spite of my experience, the work was a challenge for me; before that, I had mostly dealt with scientific data bases. Features like "write a thank-you note" and "create a distribution list" were alien to me. So volunteering for ROKPA not only meant that I was able to contribute something which helped this aid organization in its efforts to operate smoothly, but also enhanced my professional profile. A win-win situation!



Michael Krieger, ROKPA volunteer

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A day in the life of ...

Bandages form a bond. A report from the ROKPA medical tent in Kathmandu, by two Swiss volunteers, Rosmarie (67) and Helen (33).

In the medical tent, the decisions we have to make can be very simple, but they can also be very hard. Many of the cases we see are easily treated. For instance, there was an older man who had a crooked foot with open wounds. We treated him with a foot bath, ointment and a bandage. He came in faithfully every day, happy that his wounds were healing and steadily shrinking.

But difficult decisions also need to be taken. A mother came in with her child, who was running a fever and had been

suffering from diarrhea and vomiting for three days. Being small and weak, the child was unable to walk, despite being two years old. So transfer to a nearby hospital was inevitable; there, he would receive the medication essential to his survival.

In spite of the simple and very limited means at our disposal, we can cure people successfully. At the same time, human contact is as important as medical care, as we can see in the people's gratitude. To return to our earlier example, we not only applied a bandage to the man's foot, but established a connection with the person himself. And that was a gift much greater than anything we else could have given him.



Rosmarie (above) and Helen (below) treat patients at the ROKPA medical tent.

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What became of ...?

My name is Tse Chu, I am 35 years old and I am responsible for the small hospital in Zhitu in the Tibetan region of China. My wife is also a former ROKPA student and has completed her studies as a doctor of Tibetan medicine. We have two sons, an eight-year-old and a three-year-old, and we are very lucky as a family because we live in our own house.

Our hospital can hold five in-patients and has eight employees; six doctors, a cleaner and a driver. In addition to myself, two of the other doctors were educated with the support of ROKPA. We use Tibetan and Chinese medicine to treat our patients.

After my mother died at an early age and our father left me and my three siblings, my uncle took us under his wing. Although he was very poor and had a

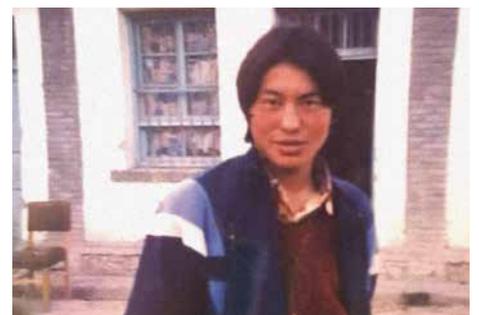
large family to take care of, he treated me very well and sent me to primary school. Sadly, he, too, passed away at an early age. After his passing, I stopped going to school and took all kinds of odd jobs in order to contribute to the family income.

Then, in 1993, the ROKPA school for homeless children opened in Yushu and I was overwhelmed with joy when I passed their entry exams. I was finally able to satisfy my hunger for knowledge again.

I have an overwhelming desire to give something back to those who have helped me so much, to ROKPA. So if someone is unable to pay for a treatment, we will give them their medication for free and, when there is great need, we also pay for food and clothes.

I know what it means to be poor. I have experienced it. I also know the wonderful feeling that floods you

when someone helps you.



Tse Chu as a teenager in front of the ROKPA school for homeless children in Yushu (above) and in his clinic in Zhitu (below).



ROKPA

Helping where
help is needed:
sustainably,
for over 35 years.



Giving a better chance for life

Many children and adolescents in the Tibetan areas of China and in Nepal – currently close to 10,000 – receive an education through the support of ROKPA. We can only do that with your support!

Only with your donations are we able to influence innumerable lives in a positive way:

- Homeless children are placed in a home and can go to school
- Adolescents from poor families receive a college education
- Poor people receive medical care
- Our street kitchens supply children and adults with absolute necessities

With your financial support, we can help the poorest of the poor effectively – please help us to increase their chances to lead a dignified life.

You can make a donation to this account:

455090-11-1, Credit Suisse, CH-8070 Zurich, Switzerland

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Thank you!

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