When on 25 April 2015 an earthquake measuring 7.8 tore across Nepal’s central and western districts, the country’s health workforce was placed under immense pressure. From triaging waves of incoming patients at remote health posts to carrying out round-the-clock surgeries at Kathmandu’s major hospitals, the workforce faced formidable challenges. It proved itself more than capable. Almost one year on, Nepal’s health workforce continues to overcome adversity in support of the health and wellbeing of communities.

**Safeguarding maternal and child health**

Sabina Basnet, an Auxiliary Nurse Midwife in the remote town of Khopachangu, Dolakha, is emblematic. Immediately after the quake Sabina helped deliver a baby in the open and saved the life of a young mother who was experiencing post-partum hemorrhaging. Through the earthquake, monsoon, fuel shortage and biting-cold winter she has provided midwifery services from a WHO-supplied Medical Camp Kit (MCK) that replaced the village’s severely damaged health post.

Women like Gyani Thapa Magar, a 27-year-old from Dhading District, have benefitted. During community outreach efforts a WHO District Emergency Support Officer persuaded
Magar to have her third child delivered by a midwife at Darbung MCK. After giving birth Magar expressed her appreciation of the service. “The labor pain is the same at home or in the hospital, but here I was not alone as I had the nurses to support me. I am happy I came to the health post for my delivery.”

**Disease surveillance and immunization – an ongoing commitment**

Personnel working in disease surveillance and immunization have been playing a key role in ensuring that the public is protected against diseases that can gain traction in post-disaster contexts, in addition to those that are expected with the change in seasons. Narayan Bahadur KC was to retire after 30 years of service for Nepal’s Ministry of Health when the earthquake hit. He decided to stay on. He worked closely with WHO Surveillance Medical Officers to establish the Daily Syndromic Disease Surveillance System at all health facilities in Kavrepalanchok District. Each day facilities would communicate with him regarding new cases of diseases under close watch. “We were able to handle the situation effectively. No disease outbreak occurred in my area after the quake,” he says.

KC worked for the National Immunization Program, which has expanded coverage and gone from strength-to-strength since the earthquake. Gorkha District’s Barpak village, which was the earthquake’s epicenter, recently celebrated full immunization of the village’s children. At the local ceremony, where WHO’s Appreciative Inquiry approach was used to foster community ownership, Manmaya Ghale, a 32-year-old Female Community Health Volunteer based in Barpak, reflects on her post-quake work. “We were in a camp for displaced people as our house was completely damaged. I knew that even though there was not a single house standing in Barpak I had to focus on immunization, nutrition and other health-related activities,” she explains. “Today is a day of celebration. I have been working for immunization for two years now, and I will continue working for it.”

**Closing wounds, healing scars**

Though the emergency is long over, rehabilitation for physical and mental wounds is ongoing. At the WHO-supported Intensive Rehabilitation Unit in Sindhupalchok, patients like Subhash Nepali are regaining mobility and overcoming their quake-related injuries. After the quake Subhash was rendered unable to walk, though he is now running freely thanks to the physiotherapy treatment he received at the facility.

Health care workers such as Jaya Raj Wagle, who is coordinating mental health services in Sindhupalchok District, are meanwhile working to offer the mental health care and support required. “Initially there were few patients suffering from post-traumatic symptoms such as panic disorder, stress, mild depression, anxiety and sleep disorders. Gradually, mental health workers witnessed an increasing number of chronic mental disorders,” he says.

In December, Dr Neelam Kumari, a medical officer in Dolakha’s Jiri Hospital, took the opportunity to increase her ability to detect and refer persons suffering these disorders. At a WHO-organized training program Kumari explains how the workshop will help her provide the necessary services: “I had some of these skills before, but this is enhancing them,” she says,
noting that sustained attention to mental health issues is important. Dr Sagun Ballav Pant, a trainer at the workshops, thinks the long term gains will prove valuable. “After the earthquake mental health issues have been prioritized, which is good. But this is not just about the current humanitarian crisis. These workshops will ensure that a basic level of mental health care will exist long after the crisis is over,” he says.

One year after Nepal’s devastating earthquake, the health workforce remains focused on and committed to providing the best care possible. We are all indebted.