On 25 April 2015, when the 7.9 magnitude earthquake struck Nepal, Kathmandu’s Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital withstood the impact. No one was injured in the hospital. The furniture, beds and equipment stayed in position and nothing was damaged. The hospital had undergone retrofitting with WHO support in 2014.

The services ceased only for a while, to soon resume with vigor to match the huge flow of injured people says Nursing director Gopila Shresthra. “The duty nurses and staff working at the time of the earthquake were able to continue their work soon after the quake”.

During a disaster, health centres and hospitals are critical life-lines. They become the central focus for dealing with those directly affected by the emergency. Not only do they need to cater to existing patients, but must be ready to attend to the hundreds who will suffer the outcomes of the disaster. It is imperative that health facilities survive the disaster and that health workers within do not become casualties due to the disaster.

During an earthquake what kills people is collapsing buildings and heavy equipment and furniture crashing on victims. At the Tribhuvan University hospital non-structural retrofitting that was done included fastening equipment and shelves to the wall, as well as securing water and power sources. Retrofitting is hence an important initiative. WHO has been strongly advocating Member States to make health facilities resilient.

Hospitals must prepare to prevent becoming victim to a disaster long before an emergency strikes. This functioning hospital was able to provide care for thousands of mass casualties.