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Himalayan Health Exchange: Kargiakh Medical Expedition

Rachel Oldfather

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Himalayan Health Exchange: Kargiakh Medical Expedition

Rachel Z Oldfather MD

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Background

Medical expedition to remote Himalayan villages involving high-altitude treks, improvised clinics, and immersion in the local Buddhist culture.

Objective

- Provide healthcare to remote Himalayan communities
- Cultural immersion and exchange
- Interdisciplinary and international collaboration



Preparation

Knowledge

- Local health needs (dental, GERD, eyes, ID, rheumatic heart, NF)
- Global Health Track Curriculum
- Wilderness Medicine

Physical

- 12-week training
- Stairs!

Experience

- Mobile clinics staffed with a physician and student pairings with Hindi interpreter
- Hiked or drove to sites for 3-4 days
- Primary and preventative care focus
- Nightly education sessions (wilderness medicine, local healthcare needs, cultural humility)



Reflection

- Interdisciplinary and international collaboration
- Cultural humility: framing within spiritual context, off-limit topics
- Lama-ji as a liaison and spiritual guide
- Responsibility: most pediatrics experience
- Ethics of medical tourism and sustainability
- Gratitude, respect, and awe of the landscape



Future Directions

- Commitment to underserved populations
- Do it again!

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