The Norwegian Red Cross emergency assistance contributes to continued essential health care, bolstering major hospitals and setting a foundation for long-term recovery.

When the twin earthquakes wreaked devastation across Nepal in April and May 2015 the Norwegian Red Cross mobilised to rapidly deploy an Emergency Response Unit (ERU) - a fully equipped self-sufficient temporary hospital complete with a highly skilled and experienced disaster response medical team.

The ERU hospital was established within a week all the way from Norway to Chautara, Sindupalchowk district – one of the hardest hit sites, to compensate for the overwhelm of Government health services in the wake of the disaster. In the face of more than 8,500 deaths, thousands missing and 85% of health facilities in the quake zone significantly damaged or destroyed, the ERU hospital served as the primary source of health care for all – from acute injuries to childbirths, chronic disease management and psychological first aid. “Initially after the earthquake our district hospital was over flooded with the number of injured and fatal cases. The district hospital also collapsed and most of the equipments buried with it. We could only look after the trauma cases because human resources and equipment were inadequate. This changed when support arrived from the Norwegian ERU with huge expertise and sufficient equipment. Then, we could look after more cases. I am very thankful to the team of experts for helping us in the times when we had almost lost all our hopes” shares Dr. Krishna, Medical officer, District hospital.

The ERU teams provided care around the clock serving an astonishing 12,600 medical cases, delivering 55 babies, performing 500 surgeries, giving psychosocial support to 4,000 especially children, first aid for 2,500 people, and training local Government health workers throughout the entire operation. More than 109 International Red Cross doctors and nurses left their home countries, jobs and
families to work in the ERU hospital. Government health workers, Red Cross doctors and nurses, local volunteers, worked tirelessly side-by-side with important medical skills being taught to develop advanced health care capacity in Nepal’s health workers with the view towards a better health service in the future.

After 4 months the Government health services had been sufficiently supported to take over with the District Health Office leading the way. The hand-over is a monumental event. The immense and highly valuable hospital equipment and supplies are not packed up and shipped back to Norway – rather they are donated to the Government District Health Office and installed in the local hospital and remote health posts. This is a major value add in such areas where medical provisions are very bare and even basic diagnostic and treatment resources do not exist. The hospital staff lab technician and nurse conveyed what a valuable contribution the ERU hand-over has been, “Norwegian Red Cross has supported us with very much advanced lab equipments …it is very much useful for us”, “we are lucky that we have as many advanced equipment which no other district hospital are supplied with”.

More than one year after the earthquakes the Chautara District Hospital remains largely dependent on the resources transferred by the ERU, “the hospital was originally comprised of three buildings however two have full collapsed and the remainder is severely damaged and awaiting full structural rehabilitation. All of the emergency ward and birthing unit are functioning on the equipment from the ERU donations”. Still in the form of tents, the hospital is operational with an emergency department, minor surgeries section, 19 in-patient beds, child birthing unit, severe malnutrition recovery centre and physiotherapy rehabilitation unit. Chautara hospital is the major source of medical care in the district, since the earthquake tending to 18,250 out-patients, delivering 145 babies and managing 3,684 emergency cases. The immense task remains for the Government and partners to restore the hospital buildings, ensure the equipment is maintained and that essential drugs are supplied.

The ERU hospital was a great achievement, saving many lives for a period whilst Government services were re-established. But support does not end with hand-over as the approach of Norwegian Red Cross holds the view to a long-term contribution and continuum. The Norwegian and Nepal Red Cross continue to support those affected by the earthquakes implementing the community-based health and first aid (CBHFA) program providing communities with health promotion especially for women and children, disease prevention, psychosocial support and first aid. The relationship with the District Health Office, Government health workers and volunteers continues strong as they work together in this long-term program.