Safeguarding the health of UN personnel during the COVID-19 pandemic

Dr Shanti Bahadur Thapa (Nepal) joined the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in June 2020 as a UN Volunteer Medical Doctor. He is currently based in Bamyan in the Central Highlands Region of Afghanistan. When he joined the mission, all international commercial airlines were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He reflects on the day he travelled from his home country to Kabul on a special UN flight and his assignment since then.

"At the beginning of the pandemic, there were no specific treatment modalities, and no vaccines were available for COVID-19. It was important to isolate the people infected from COVID-19 and contact tracing on time to stop the spread of the virus."

At the starting phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was challenging for many reasons, namely, there were limited available testing tools and treatment measures. However, under the guidance and supervision of my department chief, I could manage, follow up and refer the patients to higher center on
time to reduce the morbidity and mortality," Dr Shanti recalls.

Dr Shanti served in Kabul in June 2020 before being deployed in Kunduz, a city in northern Afghanistan, for temporary duty for almost two months. Subsequently, he was assigned to the UNAMA Medical Emergency Response Team clinic in Bamyan as a UN Volunteer Doctor.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to surge, his main responsibilities include maintaining infection control measures intact and providing health education to UN staff members regarding infection prevention and control measures. He has also participated in the UN-led vaccination programme for COVID-19, which targets vaccinating all international and national UN staff and their dependents.

Apart from COVID-19, Dr Shanti runs the UN clinic to provide primary medical services for UN personnel and their dependents. He manages any medical emergencies on time, evacuates to higher centres in need and provides basic first aid training to UN staff on a regular basis.

"I am privileged to have this opportunity to serve as a UN Volunteer Medical Doctor in Afghanistan. Through volunteering, I am happy that I am saving the lives of many. Together, we shall overcome this pandemic. --Dr Shanti Bahadur Thapa, UN Volunteer Medical Doctor"

The services Dr Shanti provides cater to personnel working with the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Food Programme (WFP), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Women, UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), UN Development Programme (UNDP), World Health Organization (WHO) and International Organization for Migration (IOM).
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