



## Interview with Dawn Factor.

***Dawn Factor, RN, MPH, Ph.D, is the Public Health Director of Surmang Foundation. In her third rotation as a volunteer at Surmang, Dawn is a principal architect of Surmang Foundation's public health projects, and in particular the Community Health Worker project. She resides in Boulder Colorado, and is a senior manager for a company that aggregates and analyzed hospital data.***

*Parasol--How did you first hear about Surmang?*

In 2006 on the Columbia School of Public Health website. Lee had placed an add for a program manager for the yet to be created Community Health Worker (CHW) program. I didn't get the job the first year, but Lee called me the second year to offer me a position with the Foundation.

*Parasol--What kind of work do you do? What's that like?*

I work for Exempla Hospital system in Denver, Colorado. I lead of team of data analysts who work with all of the cardiovascular data for 3 hospitals - soon to be 11. We evaluate and collect acute myocardial infarction data, heart failure and open heart surgery data. I am removed from patient care but work to bridge the data gap with surgeons, cardiologists and staff.

*Parasol--whatever made you take a trip from Boulder Colorado to East Tibet?*

I am always up for an adventure. I think I read every book in the library about Tibet before I left in 2007, but nothing could have prepared me for Surmang.

*Parasol--What was your first impression of Surmang?*

I thought I reached the end of the world. Surmang is not like anywhere I have ever been; steep green hills covered in wildflowers, yaks grazing, the Tibetan men riding about on motorcycles. It felt surreal and I was at 12,500 feet - which left me genuinely breathless.

Parasol--What are the main problems that you work on and how do you think your work has made a difference?

The infant/maternal mortality is higher than afganistan, traditionally women give birth alone in the barn or field without support. The CHW program trains women in the community basic skills in delivery and antenatal care. That is, everything from proper nutrition and evaluating whether a woman is at high risk for complications, to rescue breathing for the new baby if born not breathing. The program has been in place since 2006 and the stories the women tell are amazing. This year a CHW rescued a baby who was born enroute to the Hopsital in Yushu. The woman was doing poorly and while being taken to the hospital delivered in the car - the CHW literally sucked the mucuous out of the baby's nose and mouth and the baby began breathing independently. That would not have happened before 2006. The challenge now is that the CHWs are saving babies and there are still problems with basic infant care.

What's the easiest part of being a Surmang volunteer?

The easiest part is working with the Tibetans - they are funny, generous and hardworking. They care about each other *and* love a good practical joke; it's a great combination. Hardest? The khampa dialect changes from village to village - I know enough to get myself in trouble.

Parasol--What do you hope to accomplish this year?

We have more groups of woman to train in four additional clinics and we are constantly retooling our program to meet the needs of the CHWs. Additionally we would like the CHWs to take on more basic health care delivery. Last year they learned about thermometers and blood pressure cuffs and mastered the skills for both. The final goal this summer is to have a Rural Health Festival run by the Tibetans. The local CHWs are engaged and in the best position to identify both challenges and opportunities for public health to others in the community. The hope is to create an environment through the Rural Health Festival, that allows stakeholders - health care providers, CHWs, community members, to make decisions about their future.

Any words to the wise for people who are thinking about volunteering.

Make no mistake, volunteering is a tough job. It tests your ability to cooperate, problem solve and persude. When you come to Surmang you are not in charge. There is the step where you have to *get over yourself* to get the job done. When you do and it happens, the reward is life enriching.