

Maya's leg saved

Three hour surgery to repair fracture with two large bone plates and 20 screws

GYALSTEN K DORJI, PARO

A mare has received a second chance at life after surgery was performed to repair a severely injured hind leg, on Saturday, in Paro.

COMPASSION

The mare, called Maya by her adopter, suffered a major fracture on one of her hind legs, most probably as a result of a heavy vehicle hitting her, in December, last year.

Maya was adopted into the care of an American woman residing in Paro, Jamie Vaughan, after efforts to locate the owner or anyone else to take care of the mare proved futile. Since then, Jamie has been looking after the mare, feeding, cleaning its wounds, and providing support when the mare has to stand upright.

Earlier this month, Jamie found and contacted the Sheridan Equine hospital in the USA. The hospital in Wyoming provides surgeries for horses, such as abdominal and orthopaedic for broken legs.

Collaborating with the department of livestock, an equine specialist Dr Ted P Vlahos, was invited to Bhutan to examine Maya, and determine whether the leg could be repaired or

would required to be amputated and fitted with an artificial limb.

After an examination performed on Friday, Dr Ted P Vlahos determined that the leg could be saved. On Saturday a three-hour surgery was performed and Maya's fracture repaired with two large bone plates, and 20 screws. Maya is expected to be able to return to using her leg, and standing upright on her own, in a few months.

"The prognosis for Maya is good," Dr Vlahos said. "She does not need to be a race horse, her goal is just to be a pasture sound pet." He added that the accident has also ruptured tendons in her leg and that would take time to heal.

Dr Vlahos did not charge for the surgery. Such a surgery in the US would cost between USD 10,000 - 12,000, he said. Maya's adopter, Jamie, bore the other expenses that included paying for the bone plate equipment, screws, transportation of medical equipment, and airfares to and fro from the US.

National airline Drukair sponsored the airfare to and fro Paro airport, while Tenzinling resort in Paro provided free accommodation. The department of livestock obtained the invitation and also provided assistants, and medicine. A local business-



Dr Vlahos (right) and Dr Pema Tshewang perform the surgery

woman, Tashi Choden provided building material, while another local businesswoman, Ugyen Wangmo, and four school students provided labour to construct a stable for Maya's surgery and recovery, at no cost.

With local veterinary facilities lacking, 10 flight cases of equipment, which included a digital X-Ray worth USD 150,000 had to be flown in. In an earlier interview Jamie said that the

endeavour is costing her an estimated USD 10,000-15,000. On whether she is paying from her own pocket, she said that she had taken a loan from the US to cover such expenses, but is hoping to recover costs with further support from people and animal care agencies abroad.

"We've gotten tremendous support from people here," Dr Vlahos said.

Department of livestock veterinary, Dr Pema Tshewang, who assisted in the surgery said that the agency has facilitated Dr Vlahos coming to Bhutan as it would provide a learning experience for local veterinarians. Two more local veterinarians also helped during surgery.

He pointed out that there

is a lack of facilities and equine specialists in Bhutan to provide such care for animals.

Dr Pema Tshewang said that a report on the surgery would now be submitted to seniors. He said that if found useful, collaboration with Sheridan Equine hospital may be established, and volunteers invited to provide training to local veterinarians.

"We are big advocates of our profession, we would love to have a good working relationship with the country of Bhutan, and our hospital in any we could help, to consult and just improve the welfare of the horse," said Dr Vlahos. The equine specialist plans to return again later in the year to follow up on Maya.

