

Chaupal

ABOUT US

Since ancient times, chaupal has been revered as the sacro sanctum place in the village community. Traditionally, the platform of village elders sitting under a banyan tree to address issues faced by village folk, chaupal is a meeting ground of all in the rural society—man and woman, young and old, strong and feeble.

Inspired by the collective decision-making and problem-solving of a chaupal that he witnessed himself as a young child in his own village, Dr. Rajinder Singh Tonk established a healthcare not-for-profit of the same name. His vision is to provide to the villages in Haryana, his ancestral land, affordable and quality health care.

Today, Chaupal runs health programs through its community health center and holds health camps across Haryana providing specialty care and medications at a nominal cost. It aims to make villagers stakeholders in their own well-being and also address medical issues such as psychological health and HIV/AIDS that are often pushed to the sidelines in the rural communities.

The not-for-profit is comprised of a team of dedicated medical practitioners who are renowned in their specialties and possess work experience of over 20 years. The team is also supported by an experienced paraclinical staff.

Chaupal's programs are funded entirely by contributions from donors. It dedicates all its resources toward running the health camps and the health center.

IMPACT

It has been over three and a half years since the Chaupal team started visiting villages in Haryana to conduct health camps and find solutions to the problems people faced. Not only did they diagnose and provide relief for ailments afflicting the rural folk, they educated them about how to follow a healthy lifestyle, take care of their environment and village resources, and provide better opportunities for their children.

With the help of contributions, Chaupal has held over 120 health camps to provide care to over 300 villages. Each camp averages attendance of over 1000 villagefolk. With its efforts, Chaupal has touched the lives of over a million people since its inception. Everyday, over 112 patients are treated at the Chaupal health center, which covers an area of over 20 villages.

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STORIES OF INTEREST

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THE FOUNDER: DR. RAJINDER SINGH TONK

“The first thing you will notice about Doctor Saheb is how passionate he is about Chaupal. We come to get examined by him. What he is doing for our village is immeasurable,” says Satish Harsana of village Harsana-Malcha, Haryana.

As a young medical resident, Dr. Rajinder Singh Tonk often volunteered in underserved areas near Delhi to provide medical care on weekends. He was appalled by the lack of basic facilities and the state of health care for the poor. “As a young man, I remember thinking, why can’t things be better. A person coming from the village has a right to the same kind of care that we get in the cities. Why should a villager travel 50 kilometers to get an X-ray?” Dr. Tonk recalls.

He pledged to himself that one day he will take care to those who need it the most. But he knew he needed to get sufficient clinical experience first, and build the right credentials. Instead of establishing his own clinical practice where he could have earned a substantially higher salary, he joined the government-run Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia (RML) Hospital in New Delhi after obtaining an MD in Internal Medicine from the prestigious Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research.

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SEEMA’S STORY

As she walked toward Dr. Monika’s desk in the Chaupal camp in Village Khera, Seema trembled with fear. She could barely utter the words, “I am unable to breathe, and my heart is pounding. Please help me.” After a thorough physical exam, ECG, and pulmonary function test, which were all normal, the doctors were convinced that her real problem lay deeper than the breathing difficulty.

She was referred to the adjoining desk of Dr. Prabhu Dayal MD, team psychiatrist who took her in confidence and obtained her detailed history. It was discovered that she was suffering from deep anxiety due to domestic violence. Her husband’s dependence on alcohol had wrought havoc in her life. She was given medication, and her husband was counseled.

They diligently followed treatment and came for follow-ups in the next several camps. Her sleep cycle returned to normal and there was peace in her household once more.

Now, when there is a health camp in the area, Seema makes it a point to visit to show her support for Chaupal.

In the three decades of clinical practice and teaching at RML that followed, Dr. Tonk supervised the Nursing Home unit, a facility with 50 beds, provided critically-needed care to patients spanning the breadth of economic spectrum, led community welfare programs and mentored young residents. He soon found himself spending his Sundays in Banyapur, his ancestral village, seeing patients and talking to locals about nutrition, disease prevention, health, and hygiene.

In the summer of 2007, Dr. Tonk called on a number of like-minded friends. Several decades ago, they had left their villages for Delhi in pursuit of better opportunities. Today, they had successful careers and a privileged lifestyle. He shared with them his deep desire to give back to the communities that had been their hometown. From this desire, a mission was born.

On Aug 15, 2007, Dr. Tonk founded Chaupal, a not-for-profit committed to providing holistic, quality health care to villages that lack access to basic primary care.

Every Sunday, he leads his team of doctors to a selected village in Haryana to examine patients, conduct medical tests, dispense medications, perform follow-ups, educate villagers about health issues and take part in the day-to-day life of villages that were once home to him and his founding team.

“Sir’s energy is just contagious. His commitment to Chaupal is so inspiring,” says Dr. Manoj, a team member.

Whether it is recruiting medical professionals, building the health center, contacting the village sarpanch in preparation for upcoming health camps, checking patients, meeting donors, or planting saplings with village kids, Dr. Tonk has immersed himself in Chaupal to fulfill the promise he made to himself thirty years ago.

Three years, 120 health camps, and one full-service medical center later, Dr. Tonk is still raring to go. “There is so much more that needs to be done. This is just the beginning,” he surmises with a beaming smile.



THE CHAUPAL APPROACH

Chaupal's innovative approach is that of a "Clinic on Wheels" that takes quality health care to where it's needed most – villages lacking access to basic forms of primary care.

Health care facilities in Haryana are mostly located in big cities. There are publicly run primary and secondary health care centers but these are often over-burdened and under-resourced. As a result, village folk have to travel scores of miles to cities for even basic checkups. Unable to afford private care, and plagued with widespread illiteracy and low awareness, they fall prey to local charlatans who exploit them.

In order to combat the lack of needed medical care, Chaupal follows a two-pronged model: Community Outreach and Health Center.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAM

This program runs weekly health camps that focus on one village at a time. The Chaupal team contacts the village sarpanch and schedules a camp on a Sunday of the week. The team of specialists - physician, paediatrician, gynaecologist, social preventive specialist, psychiatrist, orthopaedecian, skin, eye and general surgeon, dental surgeon, optometrist, physiotherapist, psychologist – along with a pharmacist set up the camp in a convenient location easily accessible by villagers.

They conduct patient exams, and even specialized tests such as ECG, ultrasound, pulmonary function test, and blood test with top-of-the-line portable machines, as well as large-scale eye examinations, and dental checkups.

This is followed by dispensing high quality generic medicines and eyeglasses, free of charge. Some of the focus areas of the camps include: women's health issues, social issues such as female foeticide, children's physical exams, and illnesses of the elderly. The patients are then asked to follow-up in subsequent camps or at the Health Center.

The camps also raise awareness about the environment, health and hygiene, nutrition, importance of exercise and physical activity, HIV/AIDS, psychological health, and women's issues. Specialists also talk about the adverse effects of the commonly observed habit of smoking hukka, the great Indian hubble-bubble. The villagers are then trained on how to continue the effort in their community.

HEALTHY KIDS, HAPPY STUDENTS

One of the hallmark programs of Chaupal is ensuring children in school are hale and hearty so they can focus on studies and extra-curriculars.



Chaupal health camps conduct a comprehensive physical, dental, and eye exam for all school-going children in every village that hosts the health camp. These kids are then given a medical card that documents any health issues they may have.

Large-scale de-worming, nutritional supplements, and other medicines, and eye glasses are also provided. The children's parents are asked to bring the kids to the health center in Ban-yapur for immunization.



Kids enjoy their physical exams and take the results very seriously.

Those who can't see the blackboard in class are thrilled to receive a pair of spectacles. The health camp in village Rajpur found 35 out of the 550 children screened in the eye exam to have impaired vision. Sushma, a 16-year old from village Rajpur, was unable to see the blackboard for four years and kept up in class by borrowing notes from her friends. "Chaupal gave me glasses. I don't struggle to see anymore. This is the best gift I have ever received in my life," says Sushma with tears welling in her eyes.

The kids get very excited on seeing new visitors – the Chaupal team - in their villages. They attend the camps in droves and pull their mothers from homes to meet the doctors.



THE CHAUPAL APPROACH

CHAUPAL COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER

To provide continued medical care to villagers, Chaupal opened its first full-service health center in village Banyapur, Haryana on Nov 19, 2008.

The center is headed by Dr. Manoj. He is supported by a full-time medical officer, dental surgeon, physiotherapist, optometrist, medical specialist, and psychiatrist, supported by paraclinical staff such as pharmacist, dental technician, lab technician, and auxiliary nurse midwife, multi-purpose workers, and a driver.

The center also houses physiotherapy equipment including laser-therapy, a laboratory with Johnson & Johnson equipment, Sonadyne ultrasound, facility for ECG, eye exams, pulmonary function test, and complete dental care. It also dispenses world-class generic medicines at a very low, no-profit-basis price.

Similarly lab tests, dental procedures and eye glasses are provided at very nominal charges. The Center has its own transport van donated by Tata Motors to run the following programs:

SCHOOL HEALTH PROGRAM

This program headed by a medical officer has an educator, optometrist, and dental hygienist. They cover over 52 schools in 30 villages in a radius of 20km with an estimated 15, 000 students. Complete physical, eye, and dental exams are conducted for kids who are also educated about nutrition and healthy habits. Further care, if needed, is provided at the Health Center.

MOTHER AND CHILD PROGRAM

This program provides ante-natal clinical services, and examination and immunization of expecting mothers. Vaccinations are also given to infants. It is managed by the gynaecologist, paediatrician, and auxiliary nurse midwife.

EDUCATION AND AWARENESS PROGRAM

The medical officer and educator visit local villages to provide education on nutrition, health, and hygiene. They raise awareness about prevalent nutritional issues such as iron deficiency in women, adverse effects of smoking hukka, and social issues such as female foeticide.

PHYSIOTHERAPY

The Health Center is home to a state of the art physiotherapy set-up. With the help of latest equipment, treatments such as laser therapy, short wave diathermy, tractions, and basic WAX treatment, all of which are provided at a very nominal service of Rs. 10(20cents).

DENTAL SERVICES

The Health Center also provides complete dental services such as root canal treatment, extraction, prosthodontics, orthodontics, etc.

EYE SERVICES

The most common preventable causes of blindness are refractory errors and cataract. The Center provides eye examinations and glasses for vision correction. Patients with cataract are taken to the government hospital in Sonapat district for surgery.

LAB SERVICES

The Center houses state of the art machines to conduct examinations such as ultrasound, ECG, and pulmonary function test. For example, biochemistry tests are done by Johnson and Johnson machines.



Physiotherapist providing laser therapy



Dental surgeon providing treatment



Eye Exam and Pharmacy



Lab technician at work

ISSUES OBSERVED

During the course of examining patients in our health camps and health center, and interacting with the village folk, Chaupal has found a pattern of common illnesses that affect the rural population.

Nutritional deficiencies are prevalent in most villages covered by Chaupal. The standard diet is wanting both in terms of calories, essential micronutrients, and the food quality. For example, most farmers sell the milk they produce leaving little for domestic consumption. Respiratory illnesses abound due to hukka and tobacco consumption. Chaupal has initiated an awareness campaign whereby it encourages villagers to forsake tobacco and use the money saved to increase intake of milk in their diet.

Anaemia caused by nutritional deficiency is observed to be rampant across all age groups. This is largely due to

, diabetes, and coronary heart disease. These can be attributed to the combination of high incidence of hukka smoking and a traditional diet rich in fats, such as ghee, with decreasing levels of physical activity due to increasing mechanization of agriculture.

Psychological health issues have been observed as a common problem as well. Women, more often than men, complain of anxiety and sleep disturbances. Alcohol, drugs and substance abuse are swiftly climbing up the charts of social maladies. Chaupal has found this to be related to the psychosocial burden inflicted on the newly rich and the poor by the sudden inflow of wealth created by selling agricultural land to development projects for large sums of money.

“Now we have our own Chaupal health center to take care of us.”

- Bhale Ram, Village Banyapur, Haryana.

inadequate diet and poor hygiene conditions that lead to worm infestations and blood loss. Chaupal health camps provide de-worming treatments and also iron, vitamins, and calcium supplements.

Allergies are frequently observed among patients, especially asthma and skin allergy to parthenium grass.

Women in particular complain of bony diseases. This can be attributed to frequent child births and inadequate milk and calcium in the daily diet. However, joint pains mainly affecting knee joints and back are observed in both men and women over the age of 45. This is largely due to the stress caused by poor posture during farm and household work, thereby leading to early degenerative joint diseases such as osteoarthritis.

Conventionally, lifestyle diseases are often associated with urban areas. However, Chaupal team frequently meets patients with high blood pressure

Substance abuse is an especially serious problem among the village youth, many of whom are school and college drop-outs.

Chaupal camps also encounter social issues during their interactions with the village population. The status of women remains a matter of grave concern. Female foeticide is commonly practiced. This is evidenced by the sex ratio of Haryana, 861/1000, one of the lowest in India. Bhartu, a local of village Goomad, had to “import” a bride from Chattisgarh for his son Chotu who remained unmarried for over 5 years. Chaupal’s health education programs combat female foeticide by driving home the issue with local parlance, and promote better health for women.





चौपाल Chaupal

Chaupal is a registered, tax-exempt not-for-profit organization. All donations made by you go towards running the health center and health camps. Chaupal does not use contributions received from donors for any overhead.

CONTACT US

If you would like to donate to us, are interested in working at our health center or one of our health camps, or would like to learn more about us, please contact us. We look forward to hearing from you.

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