

## *Chaupal*

# A social initiative by a group of professionals

By Dr Monica Puri

The age old Indian tradition of *chaupal* finds a contemporary meaning... It all started when a bunch of successful professionals from varied works of life came together and said to themselves, "let us not forget our roots when we grow wings. It is time to give back. Dr RS Tonk, the senior doctor of Ram Manohar Lohia hospital, New Delhi, is the head of this group.

Chaupal is a social initiative by a group of professionals from diverse fields of health, agriculture, social science, management, technology with a vision to make a positive difference in the lives of rural people in the national capital region. It has incorporated community-building components such as health, hygiene, agriculture, veterinary and social issues such as female feticide, drugs abuse, empowerment of women and deprived sections of society through education and dialogue. The objective of the group is met by organising camps on weekends.

Chaupal's Outreach Programme is an effort of delivering basic preventive, rehabilitative and palliative care to the

vulnerable rural population of Sonapat district in Haryana. This initiative diagnoses and treats common diseases, runs campaigns to stop the spread of preventable diseases through public health education with special emphasis on national health programmes.

The team consists of physician, chest physician, paediatrician, gynaecologist, psychiatrist, psychologist,

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eye surgeon, dental surgeon, radiologist, pharmacist, optometrist, and on spot ECG, ultrasound, pulmonary function tests, blood tests, eye refraction are also done.

Some of the villages of Haryana regularly visited by the Group are Nahara, Mandora, Dehkhora, Loharedi, Bahadurgarh, Jakhoda, Jasore, Kheri, Nelothi, Sehri, Khanda, Bhadana, Bhidlaan, Mohmdabad, Fathepur, Thana, Rohat, Jahrot, Jahroti, Harsana, Malcha, Bayanpur, Lehrara, Kakroi and many more. The estimated population of 1,50,000 to 1,60,000 has so far been covered under the initiative. Furthermore, there are about 50 schools in the area having 15,000 to 16,000 students. Efforts have been to target these young minds, who hold key to success of the programme. On an average 350 to 400 patients of various age groups present with a wide spectrum of diseases at each of these health camps.

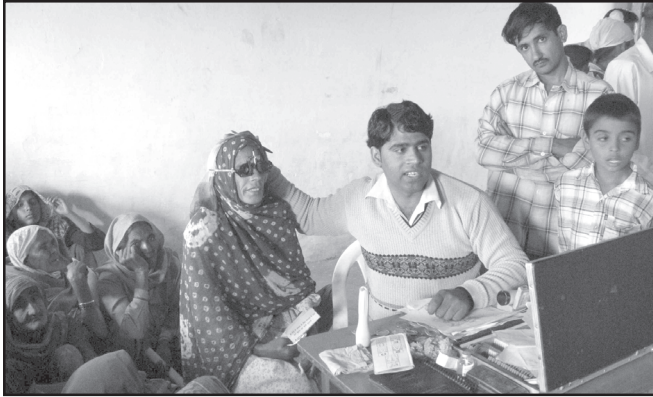
Nutrition is a major concern in an area, which otherwise is famous for surplus production of dairy and farm produces. It's paradoxical situation. Most of the produce is sold to boost the family income leaving little protein and calories for personal consumption. Chaupal is to find a way to empower community to join the fight against malnutrition.

The Out Reach Programme provides education on nutrition thereby improving awareness of the good and balanced diet in preventing disease and also teaches people the tools they need to recognise early signs of malnutrition. Furthermore, patients are provided supplements of minerals and vitamins apart from deworming the cohort population.

Mental health is the most common non-communicable disease, affecting more than 20 per cent patients. Despite its prevalence, only a small percentage of the local population has access to



*Dr RS Tonk interacting with villagers during a health awareness camp in Haryana*



*Eye check up at the camp*

even the basic treatment. Untreated mental illness is a serious handicap to individuals struggling to make a living in a resource poor and challenging condition.

Chaupal makes accessible mental healthcare a cornerstone of its community outreach programme. The health team has number of trained and well qualified post doctoral mental health professionals who sensitise the community to mental health issues. They examine patients, provide medications also and teach skills to overcome their disability. Chaupal thus believes in making care accessible not only to improve the lives of those afflicted by mental illness, but it also to facilitate the reintegration and stabilisation of the entire community, which is its ultimate goal.

The area has wild growth of Parthenium or Congress grass in lay language. This weed has piggy backed



*Dr Kulbir and Dr Atul conducting Ultrasound at a health camp*

imported wheat from Australia. It is dominant causative agent for skin and airway allergic diseases thereby causing morbidity and huge financial burden on the community. Respiratory functions are evaluated through spirometry and inhalation devices are dispensed. Through

a self-help community effort the weed is either buried or burnt.

Smoking *hukka* or Indian hubble-bubble is widely prevalent in the male population of the area. A great effort has gone into educating people on the harmful effects of smoking.

Agriculture and veterinary scientists provide extension services from laboratory to farms, train farmers ways to cultivate land more efficiently thereby, increasing productivity thus boosting income and improving quality of life.

Women in rural

areas are doubly constrained by their family obligations and lack of economic opportunity, their social and medical needs are different from men folks. Chaupal has co-opted social scientist to their special needs.

Through its holistic approach to development, Chaupal is able to address a wide range of basic needs and help community make changes that will last well into the fu-

ture. Chaupal offers professional's voluntary work on part time basis in variety of fields to help the rural poor thus making difference to their own life and that of others.

Chaupal's vision is to establish a state-of-the-art, full-service community health centre in Bayanpur village of Sonipat district. Sonipat is a very ancient town and it existed during the time of Mahabharata. It is a district headquarters with a population of about 1.3 million people. The district has more than 376 villages. This centre would cater to the needs of about 50 villages in 30 kilometers radius of the community health centre. An estimated 1,50,000 people would benefit through the out reach programme of the centre.



*Dr Monica Puri educating rural women on health issues*

Healthy children reflect a secure society. Chaupal intends to start school health programme, wherein each student will have health card, reflecting his nutritional indices, screening for common ailments, Furthermore, educating them in preventive and promotive health practices thereby improving the health of the society as a whole. The Governing Council has constituted a board of professionals to run the Bayanpur Community Health Centre.

This state of the art centre would be employing the best of medical professional after a diligent process of their commitment to be service of rural folks. Manpower is constituting the centre.