

Report on the short visit to Shodhgram

These past couple of days have really been eye opening and have further strengthened my resolve of pursuing medicine. I have always heard my mother talk about the introduction of new vaccines or the initiation of a public health policy for the improvement of a community but to actually see it, first hand, was an inspirational experience.

As an applicant to study medicine in the UK, I have to fulfill their requirement of acquiring some background knowledge of this field, by working in medical or medically affiliated facilities. Their basic aim is to see that we are not 'scared to get our hands dirty'. Over the summer, I observed the pulse polio programme in Lucknow and interned at the Command Hospital in Pune, carrying out a KAP survey about immunization and breast feeding practices. Yet, I felt most inspired when I met Kaju Bai, who had studied much less than all the patients I came across and was still able to advise a mother on neonatal care, of her premature baby.

On my first day itself, I went for a tour of the Danteshwari Hospital and had the pleasure of interacting with Dr. Rani Bang. The environment was so homely, which I later learnt was the sole reason why so many patients came all the way to the institution to be treated. Mrs. Khorgade introduced us to the various facilities of the hospitals and showed us how the wards were not only for patients, but their families too. Later that afternoon, Mr. Rajendra Isasare spoke to us about the programme for spreading sexual education and the delicate way this issue is dealt with. Having heard his opinions, I additionally read the numerous questions sent by the students on this particular concern. It felt great to know that people in rural areas are getting the correct information about one of their most basic problems, and some are starting to break away from their blinkered views stipulated by their cultural beliefs. And finally in the latter half of the evening, both Shubhra and I were immensely touched and right away felt at home, when Dr. Rani Bang so affectionately welcomed us into the family after the prayer meeting, a practice I greatly admire.

The following day was a long one that was highly enriching. I attended the de-addiction programme for tobacco that was held in two different schools, in the Gadchiroli area. It was really interesting to see the different methods used whilst interacting with children of different age groups. Right from teaching a song and the use of colourful posters for the younger children to the more sophisticated way of using the human body and biology to show the harmful impact of tobacco was quite innovative. The students were very responsive and started truthfully acknowledging the use of this vice.

The morning of the 30th took me to what I felt was the most exceptional work I have come across so far. With Mr. Yarmal, I went into the village to observe Kaju Bai, one of the most sincere health workers in the program, and saw her attend to the neonates and the mother's who required her attention. I feel it's a great achievement to have

trained people from the villages itself, in neo-natal care and basic handling of gynecological problems. She showed us her records in great detail and the precise method of using each item of the medical kit. I realized that even after 18 years, she was just as passionate about her work and fulfilled each task religiously.

Later that evening we had an intense discussion with Mr. Deshmukh on the research aspect of this programme which I found very educative. As I want to pursue medicine and later on potentially join the development field, I found it very interesting to learn about the interactions SEARCH has had with the Indian government and the amount of time and effort that has to be put in solely for research purposes. Mr. Deshmukh introduced us to the different ways in which the data is recorded and analysed, and it takes months and sometimes even years to minimise the errors in the study through a chain of 4-5 steps.

Last but not the least; we took a tour of the beautiful campus which was avidly shown to us by Chetna. The myriad ways in which it has been made tribal friendly, the rooms filled with their art and local traditions was an ingenious idea. But the room that touched me the most was the one which held the outstanding journey of the careers of the Drs. Bang. To have accomplished so much in such a remote tribal society by integrating the people's views and empowering them is awe inspiring. The work, impacting so many lives and many those yet to come, truly epitomizes what the field of medicine ought to be. This is actually one of the reasons why I personally chose to pursue a career in medicine

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