

Santwanam- Success story in urban areas

Santwanam-A boon for the elderly and bedridden, the Kudumbashree success story

Kerala has made significant advancements in the health sector and it is visible in the life expectancy rate, sex ratio, infant mortality rate, maternal mortality rate etc. But on the other hand the state is witnessing the growing no of contagious diseases, lifestyle diseases and deadly diseases like cancer, cardiac problems, kidney failures etc. When the rich has good access to health systems, desired knowledge on facilities available and have affordability the poor find it difficult to access the health facilities available.

In the habitats of poor the water borne diseases and poverty related diseases are wide spread and the death and diseases worsen the condition of poor/ poverty. The health department with its limited staff structure has limitations in providing regular services to all the needy people and as when required. Kudumbashree Mission as part of poverty eradication found it essential to address the health issues of poor as it is one of the critical elements that define poverty. There the Mission joins hands with Health Action by People, an NGO to develop Community Health Volunteers across the CDSs to provide minimum health care assistance to the poor.

‘Bare foot doctors’ a concept of Community Health Volunteers to provide minimum health services to the poor that will help to prevent contagious diseases by creating awareness about the reasons for diseases and to provide general

information on the services available was promoted by Kudumbashree Mission in the year 2005. They help the poor to reach out the health care system available in the locality and in times of emergency contact the health authorities to bring in health care to the needy. The project is named as 'Santhwanam'.

The state government has accepted this as a new model and a project called 'Santhwanam' is launched in the state budget for 2005-06. Santhwanam is an individual micro enterprise under the Yuvashree (to educated unemployed women in the age group of 18-45 years of age) scheme. The project cost comes around Rs.80,000 to Rs.1 lakh (based on the price of two wheeler and medical equipments)

Women from Kudumbashree NHGs having the qualification of plus-two education or graduates in science or that has Auxiliary and midwifery course or lab technicians/ nurses are selected as volunteers. They are given seven days of intensive training on technical inputs and personality development by HAP. The entrepreneurs are trained in checking the height, body weight, body mass index, body fat, blood pressure and blood glucose of people.

They visit houses to provide onsite medical assistance where immobile patients, aged persons, needy elderly patients living alone without anybody to cater their health needs. They test blood sugar using glucometer and read the blood pressure level, take body weight on regular intervals. If abnormal situation persists the patients will be advised to contact the physician immediately. The volunteer gets a small fee paid by the patients for the service rendered by her. They follow the best available medical practices like use of sterilized, disposable

needles and swabs for blood collection from finger pricks, and test strips for glucose metre readings etc.

The Santwanam volunteers are provided white coats and ID cards for identity and a certificate of HAP. The entrepreneurs are equipped with two-wheelers and mobile phones so that their patients can easily avail themselves of their service. Once in a year the machines are calibrated and zonal meetings are conducted to analyze the performance of the volunteers.

The project has good scope in urban areas as the no of lone elderly population is increasing and there is limitation is mobility for monthly or weekly routine checkups. The service charge availed by the Santwanam volunteers is less or more or less similar to the market rate. But the advantage is that they provide their service at the doorsteps without any additional charge.

Though the concept was developed for providing service to the poor and to immobile patients the Santwanam volunteers now developed customer base in the general public by participating in the exhibitions, fairs and visiting schools, public offices etc. The volunteers has regular household customers and floating customers thereby ensuring an average income in the range of Rs.12,000 to 25,000 per month.

The scope of Santwanam and the success of existing Santwanam care givers helps more and more women to come into the sector and the Mission intend to train 400 women residing in urban local bodies in the current financial year.

At present there are 300 volunteers in the field. 'Santhwanam', a public-health care programme with the assistance of Kudumbashree women, is an example of

Public- Private- Community partnership model in public health initiative blending health-care, women empowerment and social service.