

Healthcare is not just the next prescription

“The focus has not been just on medicine, but on providing care that transcends medicine. This includes providing support like family does, at the emotional level, by taking into account the background from which every patient hails. Healthcare is not just about writing the next prescription.”

- By Sriranjana Chaudhuri

Poverty and illiteracy make for a deadly combination. It is no different in the sprawling urban slums of India. On the south-eastern coast of India is Chennai, one of the largest cities of India. While the best of modern medical facilities adorn the city, there are millions who simply cannot afford the hi-tech care that they have on offer.

For 37 years now, a small team has been making a difference to people with diabetes in this part of the country. While attention has come their way, the people at the Diabetes department of the Voluntary Health Services (VHS) here, believe in the dictum that their work should speak for itself. [Click here for a video](#)

High Speed Connection

Low Speed Connection

Dr C V Krishnaswami

Heading the team is the dynamic Dr C V Krishnaswami who has been around with the department since 1967. “Our efforts have been possible only because of massive support from members of the VHS, philanthropists, industrialists and several individuals,” he says, typically reticent about wanting to corner all the glory for himself and his team.

But the story unfolds for itself. Little children who have received treatment free at the department have gone on to make successful careers. Dr Krishnaswami and his team regularly receive mail and help from former patients, now settled in the middle-east, North America and other parts of the globe. “The tiniest we have had here is an insulin dependent child just one-and-a-half years old. Our job is to help out as many as possible with our limited resources,” says the department chief.

He adds, “The focus has not been just on medicine, but on providing care that transcends medicine. This includes providing support like family does, at the emotional level, by taking into account the background from which every patient hails. Healthcare is not just about writing the next prescription.”

This attention to detail has led to the department owning voluminous records stretching over decades that could be the subject of a detailed analysis. Some of children who have since grown and gone away, others of those who continue to receive support.

Today, Dr Krishnaswami's department offers services that would make many specialty hospitals proud. Among them are regular out-patient services, diabetes and pregnancy services, foot care services, retinopathy surveillance, nutrition guidance and training, research and academic activity and public education programmes.

But what makes the team stand out is the special comprehensive life-time free medicare for all persons with `JIDDM' as Dr Krishnaswami calls it. This includes supply of insulin, HMBG monitoring, regular follow ups for eyes, kidneys and foot care, in addition to treatment of co-morbid conditions, educational and social support, job placements and rehabilitation.

And what would JIDDM mean? ``Those with IDDM below the age of 15 years who are dependent on insulin," explains Dr Krishnaswami.

And there are his favorite tales. Selvi works as a receptionist -cum-caretaker at the department today. Years ago when she first came to Dr Krishnaswami, she was expected to look after her mentally challenged foster sister. Her father was willing to give her away because her medical bills were beyond his reach. But the girl held on and with assistance from the department she has now been able to control her insulin requirement and even teaches others self-management.

For staffers at the department, playing family to those with diabetes comes easily. Dr Krishnaswami recalls the case of a Hindu girl who wanted to get married to a Christian boy, but did not know how to tell her folks. ``We played the role of mediators and today they are happily married."

The diabetes department at VHS has been able to touch many more lives with a loan facility that it began about a decade ago for those availing its services. This helps them get started in life, which they otherwise would not have been able to because of extreme poverty and lack of formal education.

Surely, Dr Krishnaswami and his team have proven that healthcare is more than just another prescription.

Sriranjan Chaudhuri is Manager – Corporate Communications, Novo Nordisk India Private Limited. Prior to his present assignment he was a journalist with The Times of India, the world's largest circulated daily newspaper. He continues to write a weekly column in the Bangalore edition of The Times of India.