

People's Health in People's Hands

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“सर्वेभ्यः सुखिनः संतु सर्वेसंतु निरामया ।

सर्वे भद्राणि पशन्तु माक्श्चि दुःख आप्सुयात् ॥”

This Vedic prayer in fact prays for the health and happiness of everybody i.e., every living creature on this earth or perhaps in the entire universe. In fact, in all our ancient prayers we always prayed for the community as a whole. Even though we always aimed at the well being of everybody or atleast as per the motto “बहुजनहिताय बहुजनसुखाय”, it really starts from the self or the individual. In fact, the way for achieving anything is from individual himself, as the saying goes “charity begins at home”. Even though our ancient Indian philosophy had universe before it, it laid equal emphasis on the individual and that is why our ancient sages also prescribed *yama niyam* even for the sake of individual. It is rightly said that “शरिरमाद्यं खलु धर्मसाधनम्” i.e. you must attend to your own body or individual health as that is the means to an end i.e. *dharma* or it is said in Marathi देह देवाचे मंदीर i.e. the body itself is like a temple and just like in a temple, we are required to maintain the cleanliness and pious atmosphere. Similarly, your body is required to be kept healthy and clean. It should be always sound body and sound mind. It is therefore, only from this angle we always emphasise on the health of the mind, body and soul.

It is said in *Gita* नहि ज्ञानेन सदृश्यं पवित्रं इह विद्यते i.e. nothing exists more pious than knowledge. It is only this knowledge for which the saint people crave for and in different context it carries different meanings and emphasis. From the viewpoint of health, however, this knowledge means the knowledge regarding the individual's health and the community's health and the basic knowledge of self-reliance, आत्मने आत्मनोद्धार. It is said that God helps those who help themselves. Every mother also tries in this direction so far the well being of her child is concerned. Howsoever affectionate the mother might be towards her child, she would never expect her child to be completely dependant on her for any thing right from sitting, crawling, standing, walking, talking, eating, etc. etc. In fact, even if there is the slightest delay in these things, she will be more concerned about the health of her child, she will always wish that the child should learn to do things himself.

The nursing community is always expected to demonstrate this motherly approach, and rightly so. It is said in Marathi जिच्या हाती पालण्याची दोरी ली जगाते उदारी, which means the mother really would initiate

the process of upliftment of the world. What a mother's role is to the child in the case of an individual or in a house, the same is required to be played by the nursing community as a whole so far as the community or the society is concerned and particularly the weaker sections in the society. It is often said that the mother has always a more soft corner or she is paying more attention to the weak child (either physically or mentally) because it is necessary to educate this weak child all the time.

The “Dos and Don'ts” in respect of public health are equally important like “Dos and Don'ts” in any sector.

The role of the mother is to educate the child and make him think about what is good and make him independent as early as possible but after certain age the role of the mother is over and it is the grown up child or the youth who has to decide for himself/herself the course of action. At times it is also seen that the grown up child or the youth educates the mother about these “Dos and Don'ts” or say tries to educate the mother against superstition, outdated customs and what not. It is equally true in some cases that despite the best efforts of the mother the child is defying and this problem child really becomes a problem throughout his life. It is said that you can take a horse to the water but you cannot make it drink. The role of the nursing community as a whole is to take this society/community to this water i.e. the knowledge regarding the individual and community health but thereafter it depends on the people and their response to these guidelines.

This is not only applicable to the developing countries but even in advanced countries this importance of health education and making people conscious that they are their own masters and only they can decide their own fate, is emphasised upon.

The goal of Alma Alta, “Health for All” is to be achieved by 2000 A.D. as per target set.

By 1990, atleast 50% of the adults should be able to state the number of risk factors for coronary heart disease/stroke. Eighty five per cent of the population should be aware that smoking is one of the major risk factors for heart disease and the proportion of cigarette smokers which is 32% today, is required to be reduced much below 25%. Fifty per cent of the over-weight population should adopt weight-loss measures with appropriate balanced diet and physical activity. Eighty per cent of the secondary school children should properly understand the great risk factors in smoking, use of drugs, alcohol and other intoxicants, sexually transmitted diseases and so on and so forth. More than 3/4 of the child bearing age women should be able to choose food wisely and prepare the low cost balanced diet for her family and herself and

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should be able to make the right choice of contraceptives.

The importance of small family would be understood only when the child survival rate is increased by anti-natal and post-natal care, safe delivery, breast feeding, and emphasis on mother and child care which will only ultimately lead to the understanding of the family welfare measures and the objectives of the same. People by and large or the society as a whole must understand the importance of these factors right from mother child care to the advantages of small but healthy family with higher economic standards and the high risk factors involved in smoking, addiction, etc. Then only we can really do something towards our goal of Health for All.

It is not enough that only the medical and the para-medical people concerned with the problem or engaged in the system of community health through various institutions, are aware of all these things but it is basically for the people to know and understand by heart as to what really we are aiming at and how best we can achieve this.

This, of course, could only be done with the help of medical and para-medical staff by not merely working as the employees of some institution or government but working in the field with missionary zeal and full devotion and dedication to the cause. Then only it will really have salutary effect on the community.

Here lies the role of the nursing community who by their performance and relation to the patients or the community can establish the confidence that they are part and parcel of the society and really mean the well being of the society as a whole.

Very simple "Dos and Don'ts" require to be observed in the day to day life. Cleaning of teeth in the morning, appropriate use of water and all healthy habits in regard to washing, bathing, eating, drinking, etc. are bound to have their impact on the health of the community. Only a section of the community obliged to coordinate these functions will not alone be effective. It is the total awareness in the community as a whole that will ultimately determine the performance in the context of our targets. And, therefore, the health of the people or the community, lies in the hands of the people themselves. The role of those people who are in the field will be more that of a catalyst. Ultimately, it is always *आत्मने आत्मनोद्वारः*।

Lastly, it will not be out of place to quote what Dr. Halldan Mahler, the former Director-General of WHO, had said:

"Too many of us still think in terms of medical care systems or interventions rather than thinking along new lines in order to understand the causes of the new problems and to grasp opportunities that reach far beyond the health care system.... We do not need just a little bit health education here and a little bit more health education there; we need a strong public health alliance to *move us forward*".

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