



Jan Chetna Manch, Bokaro

Newsletter No 15

July 2022

Greetings again from '*Jan Chetna Manch, Bokaro*'!

The last six months have been eventful, bringing both the good and the bad. The New Year was not celebrated with much fanfare again this year, since 2022 brought another wave of corona virus cases. January was one of the most difficult periods for our health team. Many villagers contracted the virus, and the outdoor clinic was overrun with COVID-19 positive cases. Although no one became serious, it was a challenge to run the women's health centre with around a third of the team self-isolating at home. By February though, the virus seemed to have disappeared again.

This situation allowed us to be more optimistic that the pandemic was waning, and we re-started some of the 'most difficult to maintain social distancing' activities – outreach clinics, *swasthya sakhi* (health guides) training, training of new health workers, and the most challenging of all – large-scale meetings of women's groups members.

JCMB has also been fortunate to continue to find young, motivated doctors to help in the various health-related activities – from training to developing protocols to providing much needed services. Since Dr Surabhi left late last year we've been joined by Dr Joel and Dr Pawan during the last 6 months.

On another positive note, JCMB was selected for the GROW grant. Out of over two thousand applicants we were one of the lucky hundred selected. This grant has ensured not only JCMB's survival, but also its growth and improvement over the next couple of years. Conversely we are facing financial difficulties arising from being denied permission to receive donations from overseas. More about our financial situation later....

We are giving you a glimpse of some of our activities in the pages and photos below. Do give us your feedback and suggestions.



Flowers from the field – Courtesy Thanda Devi, Community Health Worker at JCMB

JCMB Celebrating Women



JCMB's health team – the Women's Health Centre staff, Community Health Workers and new trainees

Following the tough month of January 2022, the health team postponed celebrating the New Year until February. New uniforms were much needed and by popular vote they decided the uniform colours – complete with their names and JCMB's logo on them. It's been a huge jump from the days they all were wearing saris, and the mere idea of wearing trousers was a joke!

Celebrating International Women's Day



JCMB had not celebrated International Women's Day since 2019. Starting from the lockdown of 2020, and the COVID wave in 2021, we were keen to organise our annual huge function in 2022 on March 8th. Sadly, however, we were denied permission to hold such an event. Large gatherings, we were told, still needed to be avoided. So, on 8th March we had our own mini-event in the health centre – and ate! All women who were in the centre, contributing in their own special ways – nurses, community health workers, construction labourers (who were involved in the building of the top floor rooms) *swasthya sakhis*, trainees, canteen staff – tucked into *egg chaps* and *pakor*s.

Women's Day Celebration – At long last

Lockdown rules were in place until 31st March, so, without wasting a single day we organised the much anticipated *samellan* (meeting) the very next day. As was originally planned in 2020, we held the meeting in Koromtanr. In spite of the heat around five thousand women attended.



Lighting the lamp, women's groups' first Secretary, Sukhia Devi, with JCMB's President, Asha Hembrom.



A chance to wear all their finery, our health team all attended the event.



Roboni Devi belting out her welcoming song. Without her the event would be a much duller occasion.



Founder members from the first women's group of Chamrabad from 1994 – Buji, Kamala and Sushila.



Nurses with connections: Rekha's grandmother is a founder member, and Kajol herself is an original member.



Proudly displaying their prize for being the best women's cooperative in Jharkhand: Mala and Purnima.



Always ready to display their products – the 'Grihastha' cooperative.



This time it seems there were less speeches and more dancing. Women's and girls' teams dominated the event with dances that it seems they have been practicing for during the last 2 years.



Women's Cultural Programme in Tekwara

Soon after the success of the women's *sammellan* (meeting) in Koromtanj, the members of the groups were itching to hold more such events. Group leaders from far flung villages lamented that not everyone could manage to reach the Koromtanj meeting, and not all participants got the opportunity to present their song or dance or speech. And so mini-meetings were suggested by the board members. The first such event was organised in the village of Tekwara, a small village on the border with Purulia, with very active and enthusiastic members. It's around 25 kms away from Koromtanj. On their own initiative they collected contributions from villagers themselves, and invited everyone around.

Initially it was a sad start to the day. After much planning by the women's groups of the area, and the programme all set, there was a huge unexpected thunderstorm and heavy rainfall in the morning. The organisers – the women's group leaders – were none too happy. Still many women kept coming in spite of the rain. Happily, though, the rain stopped by the late morning, and the event got kick-started by the board members of the women's cooperative.

Soon after the inauguration speeches were made, songs were sung and young women and girls in particular displayed their talents – mostly dancing. Finally, a professional local woman singer from Purulia concluded the occasion. This was the first time that women's groups have organised – and financed – their own event.



Women from nearby villages coming for the event in spite of the rain



Inauguration by the board members



The crowd enjoying the display of local talent

Community health care for women and children



One of the best things about community based health care is that the babies and mothers cared for by JCMB's community health programme are always part of our family.

Many mums and babies – born in JCMB's WHC – came to the women's cultural programme in Tekwara

'Chetna Mahila Swasthya Kendra' – the Women's Health Centre in Koromtanz – continues to provide much needed health service. During the last 6 months the number of women and children cared for has increased, especially in the outdoor clinics. The health care data for the last 6 months, and the same period last year are shown in the table below.

Health centre data at a glance: January to June 2021 & 2022

Total number of consultations in the outdoor clinic		Women: For antenatal care, gynecological problems, etc.		Children, for illness and immunisation		Ultrasonography		Mental health patients	
2021	2022	2021	2022	2021	2022	2021	2022	2021	2022
3707	4727	2789	3395	229	371	432	534	257	427

Total number of indoor admissions		Deliveries (Normal & cesarean)		Other surgeries and minor operations		Other illnesses		Preterm / small babies / neonates with problems	
593	611	358	360	48	44	169	177	20	28



Two of our nurses – Sunita and Yamuna – busy at work in the women's health centre

JCMB'S outreach health activities, through the Community Health Workers and the *Swasthya Sakhis*, continues. Though the government's schools and crèches have reopened, some small children and women remain malnourished. The impact of the pandemic and lockdown on the family's financial situation and the rapidly increasing cost of living, have caused much hardship among poor villagers.

In this situation, JCMB has continued to provide nutritional supplements to children and women during the most vulnerable time of their lives: for children between the age of 6 to 36 months, and for women during late pregnancy and soon after childbirth.



Ante natal care – iron, calcium & food!



Post natal care at home

During the last 6 months 270 women were enrolled in the nutrition programme and provided *chana sattu* (roasted gram flour) and 255 children were enrolled and given nutritional supplements.

Helping poor women access affordable and safe childbirth

Shivani Devi came to the Women's Health Centre when she was four months pregnant. This was her second pregnancy. She had a traumatic and tragic first pregnancy and delivery just one year earlier. She had been married to a poor family in Purulia, in the adjacent state of West Bengal. According to Shivani she had no antenatal care at all. When she went to the district hospital in Purulia for delivery, she underwent a caesarean section. The baby, however, had some health problems – which we could not understand since she had no discharge papers – the baby was referred to a bigger hospital in Bankura, but unfortunately died after 3 days.

Shivani was determined not to follow the same path in this pregnancy, and came regularly for antenatal care. She stayed in her natal home, a village in Chandankiari where JCMB has women's groups, and is visited regularly by our Community Health Worker. She did not return to her in-laws' house during her pregnancy. She said her husband is unemployed and not educated. Although she has four sisters and one much younger brother, her father – who is quite old himself, and works as a manual labourer – has supported her throughout her pregnancy.



Shivani about to go home

All the expenses during her pregnancy and childbirth have been borne by her father, and her elder sister's husband. To ease this burden her caesarean section was heavily subsidised by the DASRA grant. She delivered a healthy male baby in January 2022.

Visiting health care professionals help training JCMB's health workers

JCMB has been taking up the training of all levels of health workers: from the village-based health guides (*swasthya sakhis*), nurse-midwives, health worker trainees and community health workers. From the last couple of years, we have been encouraging all visiting health care professionals to not only provide much needed 'services', but to help increase the skills and knowledge of our health workers. During the last 6 months we have been helped by Dr Pawan Milkhe, Dr Jyothi Unni, Dr R Shekar, and Dr Joel Blesso.

Upgrading our neonatal protocols



Dr Joel at the outreach programme in Baramasia

Dr Joel Blesso had a bit of a language problem initially. Coming from South India he was fluent in Tamil, Malayalam, and English – but not Hindi, and most definitely not the local dialect of Kortha. Still he not only managed, but became immensely popular – especially with our babies – who didn't have any language issue!

Not only did he help the newborns by drying them quickly and dressing them with warm woollies, but developed neonatal protocols for our nursing team. We now have protocols for neonatal jaundice, asphyxia, pre-terms, and so on, which he developed along with our paediatric consultant Dr Rhea Eapen.

Training health workers

From February we have helped tremendously by Dr Pawan Milke. He brings with him not only his training in obstetrics and gynecology, but his vast experience of working in poor and challenging areas of Chattisgarh in Central India.

In addition to attending women in the outdoor clinics and helping our nurses and midwives during complicated deliveries, he participated in the training of all types of our village health workers –from *swasthya sakhis* of Chandankiari & Chas, our new batch of health worker trainees, and a group of women from Ranchi in need of skills for providing palliative care.



Health worker trainees: Taking obstetric history



Swasthya sakhi training: Hypertension and diabetes

Training in palliative care

A growing need, especially for families in urban areas, is for home based health care for the elderly, terminally ill and infirm. Even in smaller cities like Ranchi, the capital of Jharkhand, the demand for such care is increasing. The lockdown and the pandemic exacerbated the problem. A group of women from Ranchi, facilitated by another organisation, BIRSA, came for training in the skills needed for taking care of such patients. This was the first time that JCMB has undertaken such training. All our health team was involved in the training in knowledge and skills that home based health care providers might need.



Yamuna explains how to read a thermometer



Purnima demonstrates how to maintain urinary catheter hygiene



Some sessions involved JCMB's new trainees



The end of the course!

Strengthening our operation theatre team



Dr Shekhar interacting with our OT team

After more than a year, JCMB managed to organise a surgical camp – and the first in the new operation theatre in Koromtarnr. As usual these camps were much more than surgery, but a valuable training experience for our team.

This time, along with Dr Jyothi Unni, another of her medical college batch mates came for the first time, Dr R Shekhar, an anaesthetist with vast experience. Together they undertook several sterilization operations, a few other surgeries and much revision for our OT team.

A household of strong women: JCMB's Community Health Worker – Thanda Devi



Female dominated household



Proud mum – smart daughter



Off to work!

Thanda Devi is one of JCMB's Community Health Workers. She lives in an all-female household in Sialjori, Chandankiari. She grew up a much beloved daughter of her parents – her mother had two more daughters that died at 5 and 6 months of age. Only Thanda and her brother survived. Her father barely survived himself – he had tuberculosis and was hospitalized for 6 months in Ranchi 25 years ago. The illness left him weak and unable to do any heavy manual work, so Thanda's stoic and tough mother worked outside the home and was the main breadwinner for the family.

Though the family was poor, and owned little land, Thanda's parents ensured their children were educated, believing that this was the way out of poverty. Thanda had passed her 12th class exams by the time her marriage was arranged in 2011. Thanda's father thought that his daughter would be well looked after in her in-laws' house: her husband was the only son in a family that owned more land than they did, and the father was strong, healthy and worked outside the village too and earned.

Soon after her marriage though, it was clear that Thanda would not be well looked after. Her husband was less educated than she was, refused to work, drank, gambled and took drugs; her mother-in-law criticized her every move; and her father-in-law complained that she hadn't brought any gold as part of her dowry: "They said you are the only daughter of your father, and so dark as well, at least you could have brought a good dowry, he said. My education was of no use to them!" Thanda tells us. After a year of this mental torture, she left her in-laws' house in the middle of the night, sat and contemplated suicide by the railway track, and resolved to go back to her childhood home. This was in 2012, and she is still there! After 6 months staying at home, refusing to leave the house or talk to anyone, she came to Chamrabad to ask for work – any work – from JCMB.

Since then, Thanda and her mother worked and earned. There was some sort of conciliation with her husband, who comes to stay every now and then, but Thanda is firm: "I may go to my in-laws for some marriage or function, but I won't go and stay there. I won't leave this job ever. I'm helping my brother sit for competitive exams so he gets a good job, I'm supporting my mother and daughter – who else will do this? My father told me, before he died 3 years ago, never leave this job. He gave me the best advice!"

Thanda is one of JCMB's best CHWs, and an excellent counselor. Her life of struggle has made her empathise with the hundreds of women she comes in contact with each month.

A Financial Update

There have been huge ups and downs in our financial situation during the last 6 months. For the past few years we have been supported enormously by friends and well wishers in India and overseas. Individual donors have kept us afloat after our grant from one of our significant institutional donors ended in July 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic. JCMB was looking financially healthy by March 2022 – we had the support of many individuals; a grant from the Impact Foundation (DASRA) to subsidise poor families hit hard by the pandemic and in need of health care; the support of SAVE-UK to provide free treatment for mental health patients; and fortunately, we were selected for the GROW fund by the EdelGive Foundation in early 2022.

In April 2022, however, the Government of India denied the renewal of JCMB'S FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act) registration, so we can no longer accept donations from our friends and well wishers from overseas. This came as a bolt from the blue, and we do not understand why this happened. The donations from overseas had helped us to provide free and highly subsidised care to women during pregnancy and childbirth, and treatment for mental health patients. For now, JCMB is continuing to provide this care, but in the long term it may become difficult. We have requested the relevant department of the Minister of Home Affairs to reconsider their decision.

In the meantime, we request all our overseas friends to stay in touch, we will continue to send you our updates. We also request all our Indian friends and well wishers to spread the word – we need your support more than ever.

HOW TO GET IN TOUCH?

You can get in touch via email on:
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Or by phone

+919431128221 or +918084791472

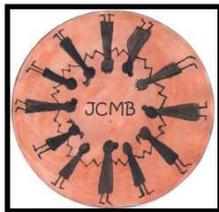
It's better to send an email though, since the phones do not work too well here!

Details of ways to donate to help us are available on our website

www.janchetnamanch.org

An important note:

We request all our friends and well wishers to contact us by phone or email before making any financial donation



THANKS AGAIN TO ALL OUR SUPPORTERS!

Thanks again to all our friends and well wishers, without their support JCMB could not continue to provide the quality of care and range of activities. During the last 6 months (January to June 2022) we have been helped in various way by the following institutions:

IKP Knowledge Park; EdelGive Foundation (GROW Fund); Impact Foundation (DASRA); Puru-Indu Upadhyaya Foundation; SAVE-UK; East West Foundation; Central Institute of Psychiatry, Ranchi; Department of Health & Family Welfare, Government of Jharkhand.

We have also been supported in various ways by the following individuals (alphabetically listed sans honorific titles):

Aditi Tiwari

Anand Bharathan

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R Nagaraj

Rhea Eapan

Sandhya Srinivasan

Shekhar R

Suma Singh

Srila Mookherjee

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Zara M Machado Prabhu