

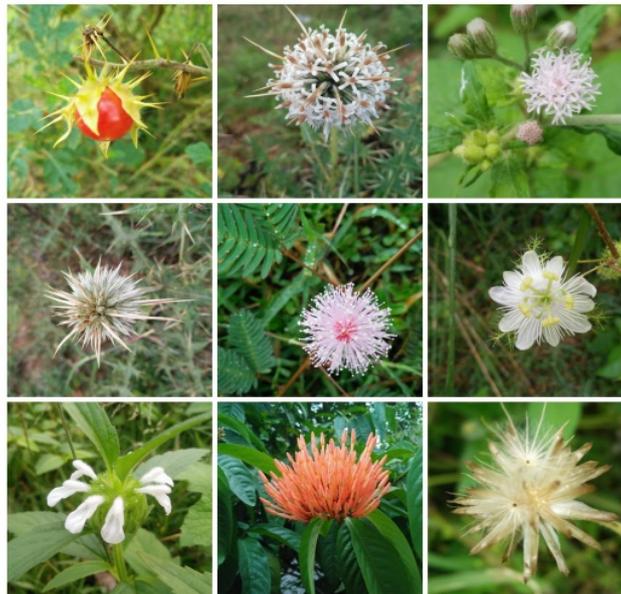


Jan Chetna Manch, Bokaro

Newsletter No. 11

October 2020

Special Issue: Six months into lockdown - COVID update



Chandankiari flora – taking on hues of the corona virus!

Greetings to all our friends and well-wishers!

Again this is not our regular newsletter, but an update of the COVID-19 situation here in our villages, and how we are coping here in JCMB. Many of you contacted us after our last update, and we were heartened to receive your well wishes and support.

In early June we put together the last newsletter – one month earlier than usual – thinking that it was best to do so whilst the ‘going was good’. We did not know what the future held for us...so many unknowns. But, fortunately, four months later we are still doing well. COVID positive cases are increasing by leaps and bounds around us, especially in the nearby urban areas of Chas and Bokaro. In mid-September there were 278 containment zones in the district, increasing from 80 in August, mostly in the urban areas. By the end of September 30 people had died, out of the 4000 confirmed COVID positive cases in the district. Still we have not seen any huge upsurge of cases in our villages, and almost no women who came for childbirth in our centre showed any symptoms of the virus.

We cannot say whether there are few COVID positive villagers around, since very little testing is taking place. Monsoon time is the season for coughs, colds and fevers, and they do come to our health centre. We usually advise them to stay at home, away from other family members, drink plenty of fluids and eat well, and drink decoctions of herbal teas. If the mild symptoms do not subside, or if there is any breathlessness, we advise them to get tested in the district hospital in Bokaro. Fortunately all recovered.

Testing in Bokaro remains problematic. To get a test done the person has to stand in a long line of more than 150, for several hours. Little social distancing is maintained. We worry that sending pregnant women who are about to give birth may pick up the virus in the hospital itself. As a result almost none of women who have delivered here in the last few months have been tested for the corona virus. In one case we had an elected caesarean section planned and sent the mother for a test 7 days before hand. But by the day of the surgery the test result had still not come!



Big crowds and long queues in Bokaro's testing centres....

Meanwhile at the Women's Health Centre of JCMB

Unfortunately – for the first time ever – we have had to refuse admission to some women for various reasons: lack of space; travel history; symptoms of cough and fever. Women who have had antenatal care from health care providers in Chas and Bokaro came to us for childbirth – some of the nursing homes and clinics closed their doors, or they were scared to go there. One popular nursing home for rural patients in Chas was closed down for several days when a corona virus patient died there – and infected many staff. Now we usually admit only those women who have come to us for antenatal care.

In spite of the growing number of cases in the district, we have restarted many of our activities.

Expanding our Women's Health Centre Outside!



More people outside than inside in the WHC

The growing numbers of people coming to the WHC necessitated expanding the sitting area outside. Instead of one *pandal* (open tent) we now have two! One is for the women who come for care, and the other is for men. It would be a pleasant sign of changing times if both partners could sit happily together! But often women do not want to sit near her own male relatives – husband, brother or father – nor sit near other men either. So, juggling space, gender and COVID-19 we have erected two *pandals*. Invariably the women's side is more crowded – but more disciplined – with *swasthya sakhis* (health friends) or other women from the village. Men usually try to congregate elsewhere, with masks on their necks, finding it difficult to sit in one place for a couple of hours.

Childbirth care in the Women's Health Centre

There has been a marked reduction in complications during the last 4 months, since regular antenatal care, and follow up counselling by the community health workers has been in place.

In spite of reducing the crowd in the outdoor clinic by seeing non-emergency cases by appointment only, new registrations for antenatal care has seen a sharp increase – 1477 women in 4 months.

Altogether 267 women gave birth in the WHC from June to September, out of which 8 were caesarean sections. Fortunately Dr Varuna Verma and Dr Alok Jha supported us by coming in these difficult times for conducting surgery. The **Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiatives** enabled us to provide free, or almost free, childbirth care to many women whose families faced economic hardship due to the lockdown.

All women who come for childbirth in the WHC are provided masks to wear. They wear them especially in the ward, which they share with other women and babies. In the labour room it is difficult to insist upon, so our nurses wear maximum PPEs at the time of birth.

Birthing in COVID-19 times



Timely actions by *swasthya sakhis*, community health workers and WHC team saves lives



Parvati getting her BP checked at home



Thanks to Sabita and Sumitra, Parvati had a safe, normal delivery

Parvati Devi of Bansgari village in Chandankiari was in her final stages of pregnancy. Her husband, Mahadev Kisku is a poor tribal marginal farmer, who worked as a contract labourer before lockdown. Since March he has been struggling to support his family. Fortunately Parvati had the support of the *swasthya sakhi* of her village – Sumitra – and monthly visits by our Community Health Worker, Sabita.

During the last visit when Sabita checked her blood pressure, she found it to be too high. On questioning she found that Parvati also had other symptoms of pre-eclampsia – a life threatening condition during pregnancy which can cause convulsions in the mother – nausea, hazy vision, headache...

Though she was not having labour pains, and was a few weeks away from her delivery date, the family were reluctant to take her to our health centre. Due to the persuasive tactics of Sabita and Sumitra, her husband brought her. She stayed with us for a few days whilst her blood pressure was brought under control and she had a normal delivery and a healthy baby.

Almost a tragedy.... WHC's most traumatic childbirth – ever

Shilpi Devi had come to us late in pregnancy. Her husband was stuck in Mumbai due to the lockdown, and she was brought to her parents' house in Chandankiari, who brought her to us for a check up. This was her third pregnancy, though she only had one child still alive. She was much bigger than she ought to have been, and it turned out she was having twins. The first baby was breech – buttocks first – and the second baby was vertex – head down. This is not a good position for a normal birth, so we advised a caesarean section. She came for regular checkups after this, and each time we reminded Shilpi and her family that she would need a caesarean.

Early one morning she came in our ambulance with her 14 year old brother, and about to deliver! Neither he nor Shilpi would agree for an emergency caesarean section. She had had pains throughout the night, but delayed coming here. So all our team – and the ambulance – was readied for an emergency.

Unfortunately, the worst possible scenario emerged. The heads of the babies were locked inside mum, and the first baby's head got stuck behind second baby's head. This rare event happens in 1 in 1000 twin

births! Our nurses tried to push the second baby's head away and inside, but the mother was pushing down. Sadly the first baby died, but the second baby climbed over the first one and cried immediately! The first baby was 2.4 kg, and the second was only 1.4 kg. Not only were they locked inside, but first baby had been draining blood from the second one – and apparently in such cases the bigger baby is most at risk of health problems, and many do not survive.

This was undoubtedly the most traumatic birth we have ever witnessed. With a combination of skill and luck we saved both mum and one baby.



A few days after the birth, the 1.4 kg newborn still needing to be fed by tube



A much relieved and happy mum, about to go home after nearly a month – weighing over 2 kgs

Juggling pre-term neonates in COVID times



Mothers in our baby room with their small newborns

Taking care of pre-term neonates has become one of the Women's Health Centre's special services. However with the corona virus, it has been a challenge to keep mums and babies safe and distanced. With none of our mothers getting tested, we cannot keep two mums and babies together. So we keep all such babies in need of long term stay in a separate room for 7 days, and if the mums show no sign of infection, we put them together. Altogether 11 pre-term babies born in here in the last 4 months – weighing from as low as 1.2 kg – survived and thrived.

Restarting health care services in COVID times

- **Restarting Immunisation**

For many weeks immunisation of children in Jharkhand – maybe India – came to a halt. In our health centre from the end of March it had stopped. Until the lockdown each week two nurses – ANMs – from the local government health centre came for immunising babies born here, as well as those from nearby villages. Finally immunisation was restarted from July. Initially only 7 to 8 babies were brought, but by the end of September over 30 babies are being immunised each week. JCMB has ensured distancing protocols are maintained, and the nurses are provided with masks, visors and gloves.



Mums and babies waiting their turn...



...to get immunised in the health centre

- **Restarting Ultrasound clinic**

After a gap of over 2 months, we restarted our scanning clinic again at the end of June. Every Sunday at least 25 women come for the scan, mostly pregnant women. Dr Mahua was initially worried about the confined space of the scanning room. We now keep all doors and windows open, but still running the air conditioner, which directs cool air towards her and helps keep her cool.



Dr Mahua and Rekha well protected & keeping cool!

- **Restarting Mental health clinic**

Before the lockdown we saw nearly a hundred mental health patients accessing care every month, in partnership with the **Central Institute of Psychiatry, Ranchi**. From April this abruptly stopped. Whilst many patients continued to take regular medicines, new patients were not enrolled, some patients couldn't reach here due to lack of transport, tragedies happened. From July telemedicine arrangements were made with CIP, so now every Wednesday around 15 patients are 'seen' by a psychiatrist in CIP in Ranchi. Many of these patients are provided free or subsidised care thanks to a grant from **SAVE-UK**.



Mental health clinic underway....



.... whilst patients and family wait orderly outside.



Many of the mental health patients are visited at home by the CHWs, helped by the *swasthya sakhis*

The longer the pandemic lasts, the more PPE we need: Negotiating COVID and cyclones!

We thought that after the first batch of PPE equipment came, things might get easier. More trains were running, more trucks were on the road. Again the **Yumetta Foundation** helped source the much needed materials for us. The plan was to send them by courier to Bokaro. But at the last minute the courier refused, and the railways agreed to transport them to Dhanbad. But... trains didn't run from Raipur to Dhanbad, so off the consignment went to Kolkota, just in time to meet the cyclone Amphan at the end of May! This time we were worried whether all the materials would get washed away or destroyed. Fortunately – once again – through friends and their friends – the package was saved, stored, repacked and resent to us. Arriving in a surprisingly good condition in early June...



Our masks, gloves, plastics gowns, all in tact

Surviving the summer months



Underneath the new plastic gowns our nurse's uniforms became unbearable to wear...



....so another set had to be designed and stitched for the hot, humid months.



A frightening encounter maybe ... but safety first!

Whilst getting ready for the winter

Well in time for winter we received a much welcomed consignment of woolen sweaters, caps and booties. These are as essential for our neonates as our PPEs are for our nurses! Thanks again to **Sandhya & Nool Koota** friends.



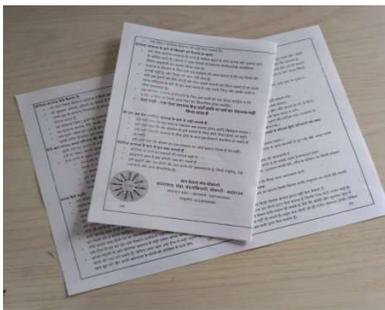
Clothing already in use



New consignment of preterm woolies

Community Health Workers during COVID times

The work of the CHWs continues to be a challenge. It is one of the most important activities of JCMB. They continue to organise small meetings of 7 to 8 women in every hamlet and village where our women's groups are, along with the health worker – the *swasthya sakhis*. To help them convey information about the corona virus, the steps we are taking in our health centre to protect women and their families, and other such important and useful matters, a leaflet was prepared for all members. By September over 3500 leaflets to women's SHG members have been distributed in almost 500 meetings held since June.



Information for SHG members



Group members discuss leaflet...



...keeping a safe distance



CHWs conduct checkups in courtyards,



post natal care in verandahs,



and counselling from a distance.

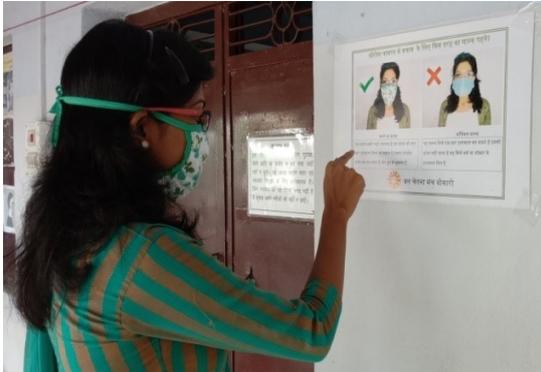


Nutrition for children during lockdown

The nutrition programme for poor and vulnerable children continues. The lockdown has hit these children severely.

One such vulnerable child is Nikita Kumari. Her mother, Nisha Devi, was married to a man twice her age, Guhiram Mahato. Her husband's first wife had no children, so he married Nisha. They had 2 daughters, and then he died, according to villagers of 'old age'. Two years ago Nikita was in the 'red zone' – that is severely malnourished. Her mother finds it difficult to find work, and to feed herself and her daughter. They live alone, with no other support. Although the nutrition programme she was enrolled in ended in June, JCMB continues to support her.

New knowledge, new awareness materials



Roopa – our pharmacist – demonstrates the best mask to wear.

As this pandemic progresses, knowledge changes, and so does peoples' awareness. The wearing of masks is now well known – if not well accepted. Everyone has a mask – usually in the pocket, below the nose or chin. Local leaders have taken it upon themselves to distribute masks to arrest the virus – and cheap surgical masks have been distributed widely. Everyone gets one, and everyone feels protected! Though they are to be worn only once, villagers wash them over and over again!

JCMB has tried to bust this myth, and promote cotton cloth masks – made by our SHG members.

At last the printers are back in to business! Our awareness posters which kept getting washed away have now been printed, in colour and laminated...

Besides the visual materials we have also recorded audio information about the necessity of hand washing, spacing, wearing masks and so on. These messages have been recorded by our team, and are played on the loud speaker on clinic days in the WHC in Hindi, Bengali, Kortha and Santhali.



Reading awareness materials

Meanwhile in Koromtandr....



Entrance to the new health centre

From June work has restarted in our new health centre in Koromtandr. Inside the building the laboratory, pharmacy, examination rooms, office and ultrasound room are ready.

We waited until July to build the outside wall of the new centre in Koromtandr. The road in front of the building is expected to be repaired, and, apparently, is to be widened too. We didn't want to build a wall only to have it knocked down! But we needed to have a wall to stop all the village cows, goats and other animals wandering into the building. So we decided to build a temporary wall, with bricks and mud, which can be dismantled and reused if needed in the future. We are now planning to shift here by the end of 2020.

FOGSI Quality Standards for Safe Delivery at JCMB



JCMB had signed up for the **MANYATA** programme more than one year ago. With the pandemic and lockdown we had almost given up, but the team in Ranchi hadn't! With online meetings and trainings our nursing team got the opportunity to update their knowledge, and the health centre put protocols in place to ensure better quality care for women coming for childbirth. This **FOGSI** accreditation is another feather in our cap during these difficult times.

Independence Day in COVID times



Independence Day in India on 15th August is usually celebrated in JCMB with songs, staff, speeches and sweets. This year there was none of this. But the flag was still hoisted. Initially the flag refused to display its colours, with the wind blowing everywhere but inside the courtyard of our health centre.

Loss of a well wisher and friend of JCMB: Dr Sanjoy Sen



The impact of COVID-19 really hits home when it claims a known person. Such is the case with the passing away of JCMB's friend, well wisher and supporter – **Dr Sanjoy Sen**. As a dedicated gynaecologist / obstetrician he continued to provide care to women during the pandemic. Unfortunately he succumbed to COVID-19 last month.

For the last couple of years he helped us in many ways, giving his suggestions for our new health centre, and by donating his robust and valuable equipment when he closed his nursing home in Kolkata. He will be continuously and fondly remembered by us as we shift to the new centre. Sadly he never saw the benefits of his contribution. We would like his family to know that his contribution has helped us enormously, and accept our condolences.



Some equipment and furniture donated by Dr Sen



And his operation table - in pride of place in our new OT

A word about our financial situation

No newsletter would be complete without an update about our financial situation!

This year has been one of the most challenging for many, including JCMB. Not only has the lockdown and the virus hit us severely, but this year saw the withdrawal of the financial support of one of our most significant donors – the **Tata Trusts**. After 13 years, our grant came to an end. Their support has been crucial and significant, and sadly came to an end during this pandemic.

We were fortunate to have the support of the **Azim Premiji Philanthropic Initiatives** which enabled us to continue to provide subsidised health care to pregnant women during this pandemic, and to **SAVE-UK** for subsidising the cost of mental health treatment.

Though the community around us supports by contributing towards the cost of services, it is still insufficient if we are to continue to provide quality care to poor people.

Fortunately we have received the support of many friends who have sent donations in cash and kind to subsidise the cost of care to poor people. Still we need your support! Here are a few suggestions of ways to help as well as donating financially:

- Spread the word. Send this newsletter to your friends and family you think might want to help.
- Contact medical professionals who might want to donate some of their time and expertise. Either physically or virtually. Our telemedicine programme for mental health patients is working well, and we could extend this model to obstetrics & gynaecology, paediatrics and general medicine.
- Donate in kind. We are always in need of baby clothes, linen, blankets, as well as all the umpteen items needed for running, cleaning and maintaining a health centre.

Thanks again to all our supporters!

Thanks again to all our friends and well wishers in supporting our endeavors. This includes the following organisations: **Azim Premiji Philanthropic Initiatives; Jamsetji Tata Trust; Yumetta Foundation; SAVE-UK; Central Institute of Psychiatry, Ranchi; Department of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Jharkhand.**

Individual friends, well wishers and supporters have contributed significantly in the last 4 months (June to September 2020). Many are now regular donors, which is much appreciated. Without this support our activities could not have continued. We would like to thank:

Dr. Anand Bharathan
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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