

Training Rural Health Care Providers Pays

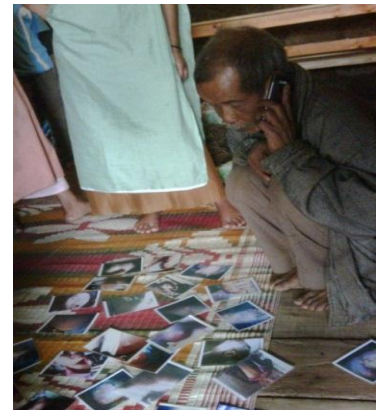


“There is medicine even in this stone. You need to have the eyes to see it,” said Kriston Thabhah, a traditional healer from Siatbakon village in Pynursla in Meghalaya state, India. Kriston is catering to the primary health care needs of tribal people in his native village.

There are many such healers in India who people in remote tribal areas rely on to treat minor, and sometimes major, illnesses. Thabhah, now 69 years, has been practicing indigenous medicine for over 50 years. He learned the art of healing from his father, also a

traditional healer. Now his wife and daughter assist him in preparing and dispensing medicine and he is grooming his daughter to succeed him.

Thabhah sees some 10-15 patients with cough on ‘market day’ – the day each week when villagers assemble for the local market. People use this opportunity to seek health care for their ailments. For cough, Thabhah has some herbal powders (churnas). He is also a specialist in skin ailments, including ulcers and swellings. What is unique to his practice is that he uses his mobile phone to photograph lesions and tumours, before and after treatment, to demonstrate the efficacy of his treatment to his patients. When asked why he keeps the photos, he said “For documentation”.



Thabhah is one of the many who attended the ‘Rural Health Care Provider training’ under Project Axshya, as part of the project’s very essential focus on rural practitioners, including informal and traditional healers. Here he was sensitised on the most common TB symptoms (“the cough”), the need to refer TB suspects to a designated microscopy centre (DMC), how to do this, and how to provide DOT to TB patients. Now, Thabhah immediately refers all his patients with cough of two weeks or more to the Pynursla Public Health Centre, the nearest DMC.

In the first year of Project Axshya, over 2500 such traditional healers were trained in 90 implementing districts. Over 10,000 will be trained in the second year in 240 districts. Training this large pool of traditional healers could contribute significantly to the much needed early diagnosis of TB.

Submitted by: The Union South East Asia Office