



Jan Chetna Manch, Bokaro

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Springtime in our villages is a time of gentle weather, and a festival of colours. The trees which have been lying dormant, looking dead and lifeless, suddenly sprint to life. The most common tree here, the *palash* – the flame of the forest – appears drab and boring for most of the year. Its leaves are used only for fuel, for even the cows and goats dislike the taste. Come springtime and the tree bursts into a profusion of colours setting the horizon aflame.

This spring we were particularly upbeat. For along with the plethora of colours around us, the corona-19 virus had almost disappeared, and we were ready – at long last – to shift our health centre from Chamrabad to Koromtandr. A shift long overdue, and postponed for over a year due to the pandemic. We managed the shift – lock stock and barrel – in one day! The logistics of shifting bit by bit seemed so overwhelming that we decided to move everything – and everyone (for there were women and babies admitted at the time) in one go. We were on a high in mid March – everything seemed to be on track.

The high didn't last for long! The second wave of the corona virus was making a significant comeback in Maharashtra. Globally the virus has never witnessed only one wave hit any country. We soon understood that Jharkhand would not be far behind, and we also realised that this time our villages would be more affected. As our spring festival of flowers died out by April, the virus made significant inroads into our community. By the end of the month, starting from 22nd April, Jharkhand's government declared another lockdown – called it the 'Health Safety Week', but it continues till date. Once again health services were severely affected – both public and private. And, once again, the government's village-level health care services were closed down, affecting antenatal care, immunisation, and all the nutrition programmes – at a time when they were needed more than ever.

The corona virus, vaccination and beyond



By the end of February our health team was called for the 2nd dose of the covid-19 vaccine in the Chandankiari Primary Health Centre. Everyone who had taken the first dose turned up for the 2nd one. Our visiting doctor, Dr Pravin (seen here getting his shot) completed his vaccination in Jharkhand. Unfortunately he contracted the corona virus in April – demonstrating to us all that vaccination does not protect us completely. Fortunately he recovered, and managed to return home in May.

At long, long last – Inaugurating the “Chetna Mahila Swasthya Kendra” in Koromtanr

For 20 years we have been running our women’s health centre in Chamrabad. From being a one storey building with 4 rooms and 4 indoor beds it expanded both horizontally and vertically. By 2020 it had 10 rooms and 12 beds – which often had to be stretched to accommodate the growing numbers of women: quality of care was sometimes compromised. Due to the lockdown and pandemic last year we had to shelve our plans to shift to the new building in Koromtanr, 3 kms away. With the lull in covid-19 cases we decided to make the shift in one go – there was no way we could manage to run two centres simultaneously in order to allow to shift bit by bit. Though we were sad to see another Women’s Day go by on 8th March, and could not organise a huge event, we decided to organise a small inauguration of the new health centre on 12th March. The new centre was named the “Chetna Mahila Swasthya Kendra” (Conscious / Aware Women’s Health Centre) A couple of days later we shifted all the furniture, equipment – and the women and babies that were admitted at the time!



Making the final touches: Chetna Mahila Swasthya Kendra



Decorating the entrance with flowers and ribbons



Spring flowers used creatively



Everyone brought flowers from their villages and made decorations



Mala, the SHG cooperative’s President giving her speech



And for the nursing team, a change in the daily routine

Making the big shift: Women on the move

Two days after the inauguration we shifted lock stock and barrel out of the health centre in Chamrabad, and into the new centre in Koromatanr. Twenty years of equipment moved in one day!



Nurses and health workers bringing down the heavy delivery beds



Making sure that drums of instruments are loaded with care



.....And all of it captured with sadness and anticipation



By evening most of the shifting was over....



The small newborn was safely installed in the new baby room



....And in the night the first baby was born



And the very next day it was business as usual. Unexpectedly the crowd in the new clinic was the same. For this the credit goes to our network of women's groups, the *swasthya sakhis* (health guides) & the community health workers. Very few people have turned up at the old centre in Chamrabad since the shift.

Shifting surgeries and operation theatre from Chamrabad to Koromtanj

Most years the 'sterilisation season' is from December to March, and we normally undertake around a hundred each year, usually with the help of volunteer doctors. This year added onto our logistical problems of maintaining safe protocols due to the covid-19 pandemic, we had to shift our operation theatre from Chamrabad to Koromtanj. Due to the donation of equipment from the late Dr Sanjoy Sen we were able to maintain 2 operation theatres for a few weeks until the final shift took place.

In spite of the logistical issues, during these 4 months we have managed 22 operations: 15 sterilisations, 6 cesarean sections and one hysterectomy.



The last operation underway in Chamrabad in February



Yippee sterilisation operations over! For now!



Our pristine new operation theatre in Koromtanj



Much of the equipment was donated by and in the memory of Dr Sanjoy Sen



*Inaugurating the new OT in Koromtanj:
Obstetricians Dr Varuna Verma and Dr Pravin Singarayar*



Whilst the anaesthetist Dr Alok Jha keeps a watchful eye on everything!

Oxygen during covid-19 times



'Jumbo' oxygen cylinders in place

Whilst finalizing the equipment and infrastructure of the new hospital, we were keen to install those things that would disturb our indoor and outdoor activities. One was the fire-fighting equipment, and the other was a central oxygen line. The decision to install oxygen lines proved to be most timely, and luckily we got it all up and running before the 2nd corona virus wave hit us. Though we are not a covid-19 designated hospital, we do need oxygen for mothers – mostly for cesarean sections, and especially for the neonates. We have never suffered from any shortage of oxygen throughout the pandemic so far.

The cost of the oxygen line was met by the donation in the memory of Dr Sanjoy Sen, a most fitting tribute.

Facing the second corona virus wave

We had just got used to the new building, when we realised that we needed to make even more changes to care for women safely. From the entrance to the wards, we introduced more protocols than we had in Chamrabad, anticipating that this time the virus would be more widespread in our villages.



Vandana greets visitors with thermometer and sanitiser

Soon after throwing our gates open for everyone in mid March, by the end of the month down came the barriers again! It was not the sort of welcome that we had wanted – with gates, screening, and ensuring that everyone wore masks. From the road to the clinic there are now three gates to pass through!

With so many villagers becoming infected with the corona-19 virus, it was inevitable that pregnant women would be affected. In the absence of accurate testing, we decided to organise a labour room for women who were mildly symptomatic or positive carriers of the virus. Other women, babies and our nursing team all needed all to be protected.



Another labour room installed in the ground floor



Purnima and Amit conduct the first Rapid Antigen Test for Covid-19 in the 'Chetna Mahila Swasthya Kendra'

We struggled to get covid testing done for women in late pregnancy. The tests took too long to get processed, and the government hospitals were crowded, putting pregnant women at risk of picking up the virus.

In May we managed to get kits for Rapid Antigen Test for the covid-19 virus. We now test all women and their attendants before admitting them.

Health statistics at a glance: February to May 2021

Activity	Number
Consultations for women in clinic	1784
New registrations for ante natal care	416
Ultra sonograms	253
Mental health consultations	170
Women giving birth	248
Small babies cared for in baby room	14
Women visited in the community after childbirth	616
Malnourished children provided food supplements	120



Mental health programme

The covid-19 pandemic has increased mental health problems everywhere. In spite of the difficulties caused by the lockdown, we have managed to continue to provide care to many patients with mental health problems. Each week a clinic is organised with the support of the Central Institute of Psychiatry who continue to provide care via telemedicine, reaching out to over a hundred patients. With the financial support from SAVE-UK, we are providing free or subsidised treatment for around sixty patients each month.

Timely help and a timely recovery during difficult times



Shefali Devi on her first visit to the health centre*

Many of the mental health patients are from families who have accessed care from our health centre in the past. This was the case with Shefali Devi*. She had delivered both her babies in our health centre, and was a bright, energetic, articulate young woman. She was the fulcrum around which her family revolved – as demonstrated by the rapid response of her husband and mother in law to seek treatment when she had a severe mental health breakdown and refused to play her traditional role in the family.

When she was brought to us in May she was jumpy, talking constantly, wandering around the village and unable to sleep. She had these symptoms for only a couple of days, and no other treatment was attempted before she was brought to us. With the help of Dr Mehta of the CIP, the support of JCMB's team and her family, she was soon on the road to recovery.

**Name changed*

No locking down poor children's need for healthy food



Shishupal continues to supply high protein supplements

JCMB had considered withdrawing from our nutrition programme for young children before the last year. Our funds from the corporate sector had dried up; the government run crèches provided nutrition supplements; and there were many other reasons apart from the economic condition of the family that caused malnutrition.

The covid-19 waves have hit children's health hard. Families can no longer afford the extra high-protein food items for children and the government crèches closed down. We still continue to provide around 120 children of poor families with nutritional support. JCMB no longer has any grant for this activity, so we utilising the donations we have received from friends and well wishers.

Birthing tales – not all doom and gloom!

Sweet Lakshmi

Her sugars would make the glucometer blush. Such high sugars are quite rare in this part of the world, let alone in a 7 months pregnant woman. This mother in her first pregnancy walks in for her first antenatal check-up at the 7th month. A routine blood test revealed that her sugars were aiming for the stars – 540 mg/dL!

She was admitted to the ward for sugar control. She was relentlessly pricked with needles to check her sugars many times a day and also to give her doses of insulin before each meal. She stayed with us patiently for 2 weeks after which she was discharged.

She learnt how to take her own injections and would store her insulin vials inside a plastic box, which was kept afloat in an earthen pot with water (a poor person's fridge). She was getting about 75 units of insulin in a day. She was told to carry a small packet with two teaspoons full of sugar with her everywhere, to consume should she feel faint.

After a nail-biting wait of 5 weeks, she was induced at 36 weeks of pregnancy. After 2 days of induction, her contractions started in the evening. The whole night Lakshmi, Geeta (her *swasthya sakhi*) nor the nurses slept a wink. They were trying to comfort her, frequently checking on her baby's heart rate, as well as keep her sugars under control by titrating her insulin and dextrose drip.

A healthy baby boy of 2.4kg was delivered early in the morning, bringing smiles to everyone's face. The mother and the baby are both doing well.



The health centre's first ever seriously diabetic mum, Lakshmi, with her newborn baby boy and Geeta, our swasthya sakhi.

Contributed by Dr Pravin Singarayar

From misery to motherhood: Anjana's miracle baby



Anjana took a long time before we saw a smile on her face. She came to us when she was only 7 months pregnant, her waters had broken, and this was her first pregnancy after 13 years of marriage. She was understandably worried. On top of everything she had no one in her family to stay with her and give her support. We knew that we couldn't stop her from giving birth for long, and a few days later she delivered an extremely small baby of 900 gms. We were not hopeful of the baby's survival and advised her husband to take the baby to a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit in the city. He cried, Anjana cried, but they refused to go anywhere else. For the first month Anjana cried most days, scared to touch the baby, and depressed – no one from her family came, and her husband barely came once a week. She repeatedly complained that her baby was so, so small, convincing herself that he might not survive.

By the second month, when it seemed the baby would survive, she smiled, even laughed once in a while! She took the baby home when he was 1.9kg, and is still doing well today.

Help comes in different ways



A much appreciated parcel full of handmade beautiful warm and colourful clothes for our newborns from Srila Mookherjee.



A surprise visit from an old friend and well wisher, Dr Sudip Basu! He came bearing gifts – tailor made to the covid-19 crisis. Sanitisers, PPE kits, and other useful and much needed materials were donated to JCMB from Dr Basu on behalf of the Rotary Club of the Rabindra Sarobar in Kolkata.

A word about our financial situation

No newsletter would be complete without an update about our financial situation! For more than a year JCMB has been meeting the challenge of the pandemic, largely without any institutional grants.

However we have been fortunate to have the support of many friends and well wishers, which has ensured that we could continue to provide quality health care to women and children in these trying times. 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. We still need your support! Here are a few suggestions of ways to help:

- Spread the word. Send this newsletter to your friends and family who you think might want to help.
- Contact medical professionals who might want to help us here by volunteering their time, or even joining us.
- Donate in kind. We are always in need of baby clothes, linen, surgical and medical equipment.

HOW TO GET IN TOUCH?

Get in touch via email

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Or phone

+919431128882

+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



THANKS AGAIN TO ALL OUR SUPPORTERS!

Thanks again to all our friends and well wishers in supporting our endeavors. In the last 4 months this includes the following organisations: SAVE-UK; Central Institute of Psychiatry, Ranchi; Department of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Jharkhand.

The donations and support (in many different ways) from individual friends and well wishers have kept us afloat in these difficult times. In the last 4 months (February to May 2021) we would like to thank the following:

Mr. Stuart Nelmes	Mrs. Sushila Rao	Mr. Gautam Chando Roy
Dr. Upreet Dhaliwal	Dr. Jyothi Unni	Mr. Ritvij Basant
Mr. Cyril Mani	Lt. Gen. Manoj Kumar	Ms. Beverley Anne Nelmes
Dr. G Chandrashekhar	Mrs. Swarnam Unni	Mr. Alan John Barnes
Mr. Vir Abhimanyu	Amit & Srirupa Prasad	Ms. Sara Jolly
Dr. Anand Bharathan	Mr. Arindam Gupta	Dr. Suresh Anthony Joseph
Dr. Jyotnsa Basu	Ms. Neelam Lal	Ms. Srila Mookherjee
Dr. Jayanta Basu	Dr. Mike Galvin	Ms. Diane Malone
Dr. Vijayshri	Mrs. Sukla Gupta	Ms. Sarmistha Gupta Basant
Puru-Indu Upadhyaya Foundation		Mrs. Ram Pyari Gupta
Rotary Club Of Rabindra Sarobar Calcutta		Dr. Sangeetha
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