

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Free Health Camps at 476 Upazillas in Bangladesh

A countrywide free out reach health care service "Free Health Camp" was conducted in Bangladesh by the organization "Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Memorial Trust" starting from 10th January to 17th March 2010, anniversary days of return of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to the soil of Bangladesh from custody of Pakistan in 1971 and his birth day respectively. It was under the great leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman that the movement for national liberation gathered pace and culminated in the war of liberation of Bangladesh in 1971.

He was assassinated in 1975. The above mentioned trust was established in 1994 by his daughters Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana. Sheikh Hasina is the present Prime Minister of Bangladesh. The free health camps were held on one day in each Upazilla headquarters (administrative unit of Bangladesh). The health camps were held in 476 Upazillas, having an average population of 3,00,000. In each of the places the upcoming health camp was publicized through posters, banners and public address systems. The camps were held in a community center, a school or a college. Physicians from private and government sectors attended patients (or provided health care service to patients) free of charge or cost. Physicians included specialists in medicine, surgery, gynaecology & obstetrics, paediatrics, ophthalmology, otolaryngology and dental surgery. On an average 30 physicians attended each camp. Countrywide about 12000 physicians took part voluntarily in the programme. Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) and Swadhinota Chikitsok Parishod (an association of medical professionals) provided necessary assistance locally guided by central office. Local social workers volunteered for organizational work and provided food, water and

other supports. Patients were seen on an out patient basis. Laboratory and other means of investigations were not included in the programme. Medicines were provided free of cost by courtesy of Bangladesh Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association. It was anticipated that about 500 to 1000 patients will attend each camp. But in the event the number total patients seeking health care service was 871132. The number of patients attended at each centre ranged from 1000 to 10000 with an average of 1830. Complicated cases and those who needed investigations and surgical management were referred to the nearest district hospitals and Medical College Hospitals.

About 1000 eye operations were done on referred patients during this period. Three children underwent surgery for Congenital Heart Disease.

This event is unique in its scale of number of patients attended, physicians participated and short period of 67 days. We are not aware of a comparable programme any where in the world. Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina talked to patients and physicians at two of the camps through video-linkage.

Honorable Prime Minister, Chairman of the trust, invited participating physicians at her official residence "Gonobhaban" in capital Dhaka on 29th July 2010. She addressed in a gathering of eight thousand physicians from all over Bangladesh and thanked everybody for their voluntary service to the humanity.

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