



Health in the Hands of the People: The Village Health Programme

Jan Swasthya Sahyog, Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh



In areas “where there is no doctor”, people lack access to services for even the most basic of health care needs. We at Jan Swasthya Sahyog believe that to tackle the shortage of health care providers in rural India, we need to look beyond doctors, to people who are living in these remote communities. Our Village Health Programme takes advantage of community knowledge and resources to better understand and address the primary health care problems at the village level.

At the core of our Village Health Programme is the Village Health Worker (VHW). Since 2000, we have been regularly training 110 VHWs from our 54 programme villages in the treatment, management, and referral of a wide variety of clinical and public health problems. Our VHWs are women, many of who are from marginalized tribes and who have had little to no formal education. However, all of our VHWs are well respected and highly knowledgeable regarding the needs of their communities.

Roles of the Village Health Worker:

- Provides first contact care for common and important health problems e.g. maternal health including antenatal and post natal care; tuberculosis, early diagnosis & treatment of falciparum malaria, epilepsy, hypertension, and diabetes.
- Organizes referrals to Ganiyari for serious illnesses or complications requiring hospital level care, such as cancers, TB, diabetes, cardiac illnesses.
- Organizes community education and preventive care programmes, for e.g. malaria control; child health and nutrition; water borne disease control; self help groups for non-communicable diseases (sickle cell disease, epilepsy etc) and support groups for adolescent girls and boys and parents.
- Identifies community needs and find solutions. For example, the nutrition programme for the under 3 year olds, which was identified as a community and preventive care need, now consists of 93 Phulwaris (crèches) in these villages. Over a 1000 children attend these Phulwaris.
- Organizes special curative and preventive programmes in animal health and for becoming self sufficient in agriculture and food needs.
- Conducts community monitoring of public programmes in health, such as the food Public Distribution System, Panchayati Raj and community education.
- Undergoes regular training at JSS in order to maintain and improve knowledge and skills.



One of these women is Janki Jagat, who was 33 years old and had a 5th grade education when she was first trained as a Village Health Worker at Jan Swasthya Sahyog in 2000. Like many women in rural Bilaspur, Janki's life was not easy. With an alcoholic husband and minimal formal education, she found had little control over her day-to-day life and few skills to offer beyond the four walls of her home. She says she had been out of school so long that she had forgotten how to hold a pen. Yet 15 years after coming to JSS, Janki is one of our 14 Senior Health Workers and serves as a pillar for health care in her community.



The Village Health Worker training gives people like Janki much more than the skills of a front-line health worker. It also serves as a means of empowerment, a chance to become something more than a wife and caretaker. It gave Janki the confidence to stand up and be an advocate, both for her patients and for herself. Early on in her career as a VHW, Janki was almost exiled from her community because she cut the umbilical cord while assisting in a delivery, a task typically reserved for a specific low-caste member of the village. However, Janki believed such a tradition was wrong and was concerned about the lack of sterile technique. When the village elders called for her exile, she stood up to them and demanded that they sign a document stating their reasons for exiling her if they were so confident that she was in the wrong. The men had no choice but to revoke their statement. Since then, as the community has seen Janki save life after life, people have come to place deep trust in Janki's work. She is a highly respected member of her village and the first person people turn to when someone falls ill.



How you can contribute

By supporting our Village Health Programme, you are supporting people like Janki, whose lives are turned around by the training they receive at JSS. You are also supporting the thousands of lives that these women care for every year. From encouraging a family to bring their child with snake bit to the hospital instead of a traditional healer, to preparing and delivering blood smears for the diagnosis of falciparum malaria, these individuals are saving lives. Health starts in the community. Please consider donating to sponsor a VHW like Janki, or another member of the Village Health Programme staff.

Support the livelihood of our Village Health Workers (VHW):

- Sponsor a Village Health Worker (1 VHW): **\$50 per month** or **\$600 per year**
- Sponsor Primary Health Care for a Village (2 VHWs): **\$100 per month** or **\$1,200 per year**
- Sponsor our Village Health Worker programme (110 VHWs): **\$5,000 per month** or **\$60,000 per year**

Support our Village Health Programme Staff:

- Sponsor a Training Coordinator: **\$450 per month** or **\$5,400 per year**
- Sponsor 7 Cluster Managers: **\$550 per month** or **\$6,600 per year**
- Sponsor a Senior Doctor: **\$750 per month** or **\$9,000 per year**