

Experiential Learning for Social Accountability: Dhanvatari Seva Yatra by Government Medical College Bhavnagar Students and Faculty

By Chinmay Shah



Summary

The Northwest area of India has very poor health infrastructure due to disparities in the area, and the approach and availability of health care professionals. Students and faculty of different health professional streams from Bhavnagar Medical College join every year in a mega health camp known as Dhanavatri Seva Yatra for the last 15 years. This activity is conducted without any financial support from the government. Transportation is taken care of by volunteers and accommodations are arranged locally. Every year for seven days this team of professionals works in different areas of the northeast region to serve the community. This will inculcate social accountability in students as explained by Kolb's experiential learning theory.

Effective learning is seen when a person progresses through a cycle of four stages as described by Kolb (1) having a concrete experience followed by (2) observation of and reflection on that experience which leads to (3) the formation of abstract concepts (analysis) and generalizations (conclusions) which are then (4) used to test a hypothesis in future situations, resulting in new experiences(1) Its application has also been linked to service

learning to help learners to acquire specific knowledge and skills, as well as to develop an ethical sense of responsibility in society(2).

In the present case study, we would like to share our experiences regarding one such activity deployed at our college to inculcate social responsibility and patriotism in students of health professional courses, i.e.: medical , dental, nursing, and laboratory technician.

Health care facilities in Northeast India differ from the rest of the country. Northeast India has rich natural resources and a high potential to develop but it is not growing as much as expected. The differences in geographical conditions and the difficult terrain further results in differences in economic growth rates and acts as both constraints and barriers for provisioning of potential health infrastructure in this region which results in improper health facilities.

As per the IPHS, one sub-center is established for every 5,000 people in the plain area and for every 3,000 people in the hilly area. Whereas PHC covers 20,000 to 30,000 people respectively and CHC covers 80,000 to 1,200,000 people, respectively. The insufficiency in the health workforce is due to unavailability of skilled health professionals and the absence of sufficient medical college and training institutes in the region (3). Despite the North Eastern Council, Northeast experienced widespread disparity of poverty and socioeconomic achievements across different states within the rural and urban areas (4).

Dhanvantari Seva Yatra is a mega, free health campaigning program across the entire North Eastern States of India, which is jointly organized by Seva Bharati, Purbanchal, and the National Medicos Organization (NMO) since 2005. Doctors from all over the country and various medical colleges and students from abroad take part in this novel venture by voluntarily imparting their services. To date, 15 sessions of Dhanavanatari Seva Yatra (DSY) have been organized. Dhanvantari, the founder of the Indian system of medicine and the preceptor of health, happiness, and tranquility, the Seva Yatra provides health services with free distribution of medicines, creating health awareness, hygiene, and health education. Doctors from all over the country and abroad who specialize in different streams of medical science and super specializations, as well as faculty members of various medical and dental colleges and students of advance medical courses take part in this novel venture voluntarily and give their services.



The prime motivation behind this humble endeavor besides providing free medical assistance, is also to acquaint the participating doctors with the rich and diverse culture of the local community which is nothing but the part and parcel of the Bharatiya Cultural heritage. At the same time, it is an effort to connect with our local community and assure them that the whole country cares for them and strongly stands behind them in their time of need. The other purpose of the medical camps was to make the isolated people of Northeast India realize that the people of the rest of India worry about them and want to see them healthy and happy. One more objective was to highlight the problems related to the health of the people and to inform the government of the main problems of those areas because even today there is an acute shortage of doctors in government hospitals or centers.

Every year, faculty and students of GMC Bhavnagar participate in this effort. If we see the statistics of one year, this mega camp takes place around seven days in a year with approximately 318 consultants, 331 senior students from all over India, and around 15 faculty and 35 students from our participating college.

For seven days they are divided into groups of three and organize approximately 754 camps (Image 1) covering 2,011 villages. In 2015, approximately 131,000 patients attended the camps free of cost. Even if someone wants to show his patient to a private doctor, it is either very difficult to show him here or there is no private practitioner available at that place. During this camp if severe disease was discovered by the team then medicine is provided to them and many patients are also referred to higher medical care centers or government district hospitals.

During this camp, free medicine is provided, and their personal hygiene, smoking, alcohol, tobacco, and betel nut addiction are also addressed through role play and photographs. The volunteers of Purvanchal Seva Bharti start

preparing months in advance and they arrange the entire journey and medical camp. Doctors live in rural areas either in schools or in the homes of villagers associated with Seva Bharati, and they are used to maintaining on vegetarian food. It was the people associated with Seva Bharati who used to arrange vehicles for transportation needs. At the end of camp, the members of various medical teams return with their vivid experiences about the North Eastern states which may be worth contributions in the comprehensive context of national integration.

The distance from our college to the palace of camp is around 3500 kilometers, it takes more than 36 hours by train roundtrip. They have to serve in difficult situations, and they do not get any remuneration. Despite all these odds students are happy to work at the camps and the number of students increases every year.



This Yatra is playing an important role in inculcating social accountability in health professionals, help in developing patriotism, and also changing the mindset of many students regarding their future planning and engaging them in helping to develop resilience. We can see the job satisfaction on the face of each and every volunteer in valedictory function organized at an area of service (Image 2) as well as welcome function at the Government Medical College in Bhavnagar (Image 3). This unique way of inculcating social accountability was started by our former dean Dr. C. B. Tripathi and it continues to last year. The most recent year was planned in May but due to the coronavirus pandemic it was not possible.

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