

REPORT

Medical Mission to Nandigram

[After the incident of firing by the police at Nandigram on 14.3.2007, reports of large-scale injuries and ailments arising out and as a consequence of the said incident had reached the media. Some doctors and health workers decided to visit the affected areas to render the very urgent medical help to the people affected by the incident.

A team of doctors (Medical Service Centre, Kolkata) visited several affected villages of Nandigram and came out with a report, Excerpts :]

On 18.3.2007, a team comprising six physicians (including 2 female physicians), three junior doctors, sisters, medical students and health-workers, organised by public-spirited organisations working on public health, i.e., SRAMAJIBI SWASTIYA UDYOG, PEOPLES' HEALTH and JANA-SWASTHA SWADIKAR MANCHA, visited some of the affected areas of Nandigram to render medical help to the affected people.

The Medical Team found that more severely injured patients had mostly been taken to the hospital and persons who were critically injured had been transferred to Tamluk Hospital (District Hospital) and SSKM Hospital, R G Kar Medical College and Hospital of Kolkata. But they found that a very large population, predominantly women, were suffering from blunt trauma injuries, very often multiple, and had not received any medical help. The same is true also for a very large number of people suffering from eye-problems (headache, watering, photophobia, burning sensation, dimness of vision etc.) even 4 days after the tear-gas exposure on 14.3.2007. People were also suffering from mental trauma, though unfortunate! the medical team did not have a psychiatrist or a psychologist who could have professionally assessed the actual extent of the trauma. The medical team treated 129 patients and had the opportunity to talk to about 300 victims, who described the unprovoked and brutal attack on unarmed assembly of villagers, including a large number of women and children, which continued even after people had dispersed and was trying to flee from the scene. The women also described with horrid details of sexual assaults on them. Attackers, they said, included a large number of persons in police uniform but with chappals on. The Medical Team had also found that many could not return to their home and resume their normal activities. Camps were organised by the local people to provide food for these affected people. These camps were found to be suffering from an acute shortage of provisions required to run the kitchen (the medical team bought a day's provision for one camp).

The next visit took place on 21.3.2007. It was a general relief cum medical team, consisting of two physicians and four health workers. There was a plan for documenting the trauma of the victims, though due to shortage of time, additional burden of general relief work, the number of patients treated and documented was limited to only 30 in three different places. General relief and provisions worth Rs 15,740 were provided to four different relief camps in the affected areas.

The third visit was on 24-25' March, 2007. From the experience of two previous visits by the medical team, it was decided that the team should stay overnight in the affected villages to render more intensive and extensive medical assistance, and that it would concentrate on medical relief only. This time the team comprised eight doctors, including two female doctors and one orthopaedic surgeon, one sister and seven health workers. They organised 4 medical camps—in Soudkhali (24.3.2007), Sonachura High School (25.3.2007), Kalicharanpur Primary School (25.3.2007) and Dakshin Jalpai- Bhangabera (25.3.2007). It may be mentioned here that one eye relief camp was organised concurrently in Sonachura High School on 25.3.2007 by ARGUS COMMUNITY EYE SERVICES.

A brief description of various types of patients seen on 24/25.3.2007 is as follows:

Camps: Soudkhali, Kalicharanpur, Dakshin Jalpai, Sonachura. Date: 24.3.2007 and 25.3.2007

Total cases seen: 261
 Cases directly related to the incident of 14.3.2007 230
 Male 83 (36%)
 Female 147 (64%)
 Child 9 (4%)
 Hindu (mostly SC) 222
 Muslim 8
 Eye problems 135 (58.6%)
 Direct hit by the police 54 (23.4%)
 Other musculo-skeletal injury 41 (17.8%)
 Multiple injury 27 (11.7%)
 Bullet injury 4
 Ear injury 2 (Children)
 Fracture 1
 Spinal injury 1

Mental trauma 28 (12.1%)

- 70% to 80% of the patients of all camps had eye problems since 14.3.2007, but in Sonachura camp these patients attended cocurrently running eye camp, hence the average shows a lower figure.
- The doctors in the team (except those at Sonachura camp) had no training in properly assessing post traumatic stress, hence this condition may be found to be underreported particularly in the three other camps.

Eye Camp : Sonachura

Date : 25.3.2007

Organised by ARGUS COMMUNITY EYE SERVICES

Total cases seen: 155 Cases directly related

to the incident of 14.3.2007 114

Male 55 (48.2%)

Female 55 (48.2%)

Child 4 Hindu (mostly SC) ALL Muslim Nil

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

1. It was seen from the TV clips that many persons were shot at the chest, abdomen and even in their heads, though when dispersing a mob, the police is to "use as liule force and do as little injury to person and property as may be consistent with dispersing the assembly, arresting and detaining such persons". (Section 130. CrPc)
2. The medical team also saw other cases of bullet injuries at face level in the village.
3. The number of viciims was found to be very large and included a large number of women and children also.
4. The lathi charge was extensive, it was inflicted even on women who had already fled from the place of assembly and was hiding in nearby houses and bushes in and around the place. This lathi charge was severe, producing multiple blunt injuries with bruises which was evident on medical examination even on 4, 7, 11, 12 days after the event. These injuries included fracture, spine injury, chest injury etc. Injury marks were mostly found on the upper part of the body upwards. It may be mentioned here that when the medical team had reached the scene, the people with major injuries had already been taken to various hospitals.
5. Many people suffered from the musculo-skeletal injuries including fall etc.. as they were trying to escape the scene and police was persistently chasing them.
6. Many persons were injured due to beating by the police while they were trying to rescue the injured persons and the children.

7. Many women complained of sexual assault. They were also found to bear injury marks on their breasts, abdomen and private part. However, lack of privacy and other infrastructure prevented the medical team from proper physical examination and even thorough history taking.
8. A very large number of affected people, predominantly women, were found to be suffering from eye problems (burning sensation, watering, photophobia, headache, dimness of vision etc), persisting even 11 days after exposure to tear gas. So much so that every camp attended to 70-80 percent of patient suffering from eye problems related to tear gas exposure. It may be noted that the people were aware that there may be tear gas attack, they knew that in case of tear gas attack they were to wash the eyes with copious amount of water, and they followed this instruction. Some persons also had injury in eye and other parts of the body from tear gas shell explosion, burn injury from contact of tear gas shell, history of breathlessness from close exposure to tear gas.
9. Thus it appears to the medical team that the gas used against the people may not be the usual tear gas ordinarily used to disperse the mob, but something unusual having more permanent and serious effects. The medical team urges a serious investigation into this matter.
10. It was found that although most of the severely wounded people were transferred to hospitals, a few seriously-wounded persons, including a nine-year-old boy suffering from supracondylar fracture of arm. a spinal injury patient etc., practically received no medical attention. Also, many people, who attended Nandigram Hospital, did not receive medicines due to shortage of required medicine and many patients could not be examined and investigated properly due to lack of infrastructure there. Patients suffering from eye problems received almost no medical treatment. It may be noted here that Nandigram Hospital (BPHC) may be called a glorified primary health centre and is not equipped to deal with so many serious injuries and other cases. It was learnt that this Hospital did not receive much additional support even after the incident.
11. Many patients were found to be suffering from mental trauma with symptoms of sleeplessness, anorexia, anxiety and fear. Many women saw people, even children being killed, wounded people snatched. They were in fear of repeat of attack, anxiety for the safety of near and dear ones, and particularly about sexual assault of young daughters. But unfortunately the medical team had no trained human resource to properly assess the situation, so the number of patients suffering from mental trauma mentioned here would be an understatement of the actual state of affairs. However, a team of psychiatrists, psychologists and other mental health workers had already organised a camp in Sonachura on 31.3.2007. Their reports will be published soon.
12. An interesting observation was that very few patients came to the medical camp for ailments unrelated to the incidence of 14.3.2007 and those who came for injuries etc also reported the injuries only and generally had no other medical complaint.
13. The team of doctors also conducted a training camp for local volunteers so that if any untoward incident takes place again, these volunteers would be in a position to render rudimentary patient care (containment of bleeding, removing the patients observing proper protocol, wound dressing and things like that). 22 volunteers from different parts of the area covering almost the entire affected zone were trained and 10 emergency kit with a couple of manuals in Bengali language were distributed among them.
14. On the two previous visits the Team attended to 169 patients. Though the previous two visits were not very well documented, it can be said that the general observation was basically the same. Members of the Team also visited Nandigram Hospital, Tamluk Hospital and SSKM Hospital.

Some Highlights

1. Radharani Ari. Found unconscious (and without clothes) in a bush 2 days after the incident, Complained of pain in whole body and particularly in private parts after regaining consciousness. According to her—male police took her to a bush and were beating her when she lost consciousness.
2. Kabita Adhikari. Fracture Rt patella and Lt wrist. According to her, she was in Anadi Mai's home on 14th March, when male police dragged her out and beaten her severely.
3. Sankari Gol. Severely beaten by male police, admitted with Rt leg fracture and multiple injury with stitches on head.
4. Sovarani Sinha. According to her. a child was snatched away and killed before her eyes.

S Anubha Khanda. Admitted with rubber bullet in knee, admitted and operated on 14th March. Her husband Rasbehari Khanda has been transferred to SSKM Hospital, Kolkata in very serious condition, now in intensive care unit.□