

NOTE

Barefoot Doctors

O C writes :

The first medical camp organized by United Milli Forum's newly trained health workers was successfully conducted at Islam Nagar in Ranchi, the Jharkhand capital on 25 January 2010.

Over 250 residents of the state capital's largest slum attended the camp where they were provided free consultation and medicines.

For two continuous days prior to the medical camp patients were screened by the UMF health workers who also prepared their case histories for further examination by doctors from Calcutta and Ranchi.

A surprisingly large number of patients treated at the camp suffered from hypertension, which doctors attributed to poverty and high stress of living in an area with poor infrastructure. A bulk of the residents of Islam Nagar are extremely poor and the area has a severe problem of sanitation also, with overflowing sewage drains and uncollected garbage.

Ten UMF health workers, out of the 13 trained so far, participated in the medical camp. Each of them has undergone training for two months at Shramik Krishak Maitri Swasthya Kendra, the rural low-cost clinic in the district of Howrah in West Bengal, in a variety of subjects from history-taking and identification of common diseases and their management. They have been trained in use of about 25 relatively safe drugs. Fresh batches of students from Jharkand and also Bihar will be sent throughout 2010 to take part in the training programme, run by Shramjiibi Maitri Swasthya Udyog, a non-profit collective of doctors promoting low-cost healthcare.

Some of the trained health workers, based in Ranchi itself, will also do follow up work with the patients who attended the medical camp. There are active plans to set up a counselling centre in Islam Nagar where two health workers will be available for consultation three times a week.

Other UMF health workers, mostly from the districts of Sahebganj, Pakur and Jamtada have started work in rural areas to survey the public health situation, provide counselling and mobilise communities to tackle health problems in a collective manner.

The UMF is also considering a campaign to enrol people Below Poverty Line (BPL) in Jharkhand in the central government's Rajiv Gandhi Swasthya Bima Yojana, which provides a health insurance cover of upto Rs 30,000 per family. Other work planned includes providing protective measures to bidi workers to help reduce the risk of respiratory diseases, cleaning up village ponds and helping villagers benefit from state and central government schemes related to health, nutrition and employment. □□□