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Taking health to the grassroots (View Comments)

Unnati Narang
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Healthcare professionals often cite the importance of prevention of diseases. Most of the time, simple precautionary measures can go a long way in ensuring better health for a person. Designing innovative solutions, often using technology, to answer some of the pressing healthcare challenges is the need of the hour. One of the recent initiatives in this direction is the 'tippy tap' – a low tech hand washing device that encourages use of soap. Dr Jared Buono, PhD, co-founder, Watershed Management Group, a nonprofit, says, "In India, around 1,000 children die every day from acute diarrhoea and respiratory illness. Hand washing with soap at appropriate times could save almost half of these lives." The group recently won the best 'thrifty video' DoGooder Award for the film It's in Your Hands. The film shows the working of a tippy tap and has garnered over 150,000 views.

While using film and visual media for promoting the cause of health is one way of reaching the masses, there are also many community driven projects led by youngsters from smaller parts of India. Take the case of Saif Mohammed, an energetic 29-year-old project manager for Government Palliative Care Project, for the state of Kerala. Involved with the National Rural Health Mission, Saif bases his work on the belief that caring for the patient, in whatever disease stage he/she may be can have huge benefits. He has now involved students in the project too. "We are running an initiative called students in palliative care. The concrete task of the organisation is to organise adequate and affordable support programs for the bedridden, the incurably ill and the dying people. It ensures the involvement of students in patient care and rehabilitation programs by mobilizing local community, volunteers, material and financial resources."

So while the private healthcare sector is booming, with new hospitals springing up every now and then, there is a parallel revolution at the grassroots led by dedicated youngsters. Many students of medical education, who are involved in internships and projects in rural areas, also find immense opportunity in these places where healthcare has still not penetrated fully. Jayati Dureja is a third year MBBS student at Kasturba Medical College (KMC), Manipal University. "As part of our course, we often go for educational trips and rural postings. I went to visit primary healthcare centres in a place called Ullal near Mangalore. It is not hard to see how much scope there is for healthcare in smaller cities and villages. For the DOTS programme that aims to tackle tuberculosis, the government hires volunteers who make sure that patients comply with their drug prescriptions. These volunteers are not just youngsters, but also senior citizens retired from fulltime jobs," says Dureja.

World Health Day is the best time to see where India stands when it comes to delivery of healthcare. However, not all of it can be captured in growth figures. Many unsung heroes at the grassroots make health accessible for more than seventy percent of our over hundred billion people settled in villages. Rural healthcare in itself is a huge career opportunity today. The question is whether you are ready to take the plunge.

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