

NATIONAL VITAMIN A CAMPAIGN

The chronicle of a health worker

DR MAHMOOD KAZI MOHAMMED

More than a hundred countries are affected by vitamin A deficiency. It is a global public health problem that causes serious conditions like child blindness, night blindness, and even death. In developing countries like Bangladesh, vitamin A deficiency is a public health obstacle. A country-wide vitamin A campaign is a significant strategy to supplement the population with vitamin A twice every year. Over the years, this campaign has evolved through several changes and improvements, through the association of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) like Nutrition International along with other civil society partners.

In a conversation with a medical technologist Pradumna Kumar Das, who works on the vitamin A campaign in the hard-to-reach area of Balaganj Upazilla of Sylhet district, we explored the importance of the campaign. When asked about his opinion regarding the usefulness of the vitamin A campaign, his response was spontaneous, "When I started working back in 1989, night blindness was like an epidemic. But, with the gradual growth and spread of vitamin A campaign, the frequency of the disease has notably reduced."

He explained how the



PHOTO: NUTRITION INTERNATIONAL BANGLADESH

campaign works. "We provide two kinds of capsules in the campaign – blue capsules for the infants aged 6-11 months and red ones for the children aged 12-59 months. Providing the capsules has done wonders to reduce vitamin A deficiency."

He drew anecdotes from his initial years of working on vitamin A supplementation. He memorised, "I used to live in a village with a small river, which I had to cross every day to go to work. The boat that I used to ride in had a boatman who could never reach his hand to collect money in the evening. I assumed that he had night blindness, but

I was assured after I asked him, and he confirmed. I gave him the red capsules as per prescription, and fortunately, his eyesight was better in about two to three months." He further added, "This is when I truly understood the impact of the vitamin A campaign in reality. Now, the national vitamin A campaign has raised awareness among the people as well."

Mr Das quoted from his experience of more than 20 years to describe the reality of the situation back then. He said, "We would go to households and provide capsules, but people would throw them

out. Now with NGOs like Nutrition International's help, the campaigns run more pragmatically. Instead of just providing the capsules, we help people consume them and make sure that they understand its importance."

Nutrition International has provided logistical and financial support to the National Vitamin A Campaign (NVAC). Additionally, it has designed the innovative 'Child-to-Child (CIC) Search Strategy' to reach children in the hard-to-reach areas of Bangladesh. Mr Das shared, "Balaganj Upazila has 14 unions, most of which are hard

to reach. Before, we had to use our own money to reach those areas to perform our duties. But now, with the support of Nutrition International, the work is easier, and people are more motivated. They also provide volunteer honorarium, which did not exist earlier. The honorarium has helped in improving and increasing our workforce."

Speaking about the success of the NVAC, Mr Das said, "You see, these kinds of extensive campaigns are impossible to run in such adverse surroundings with low workforce and resources. Moreover, people were not even aware enough to cooperate with us. But because of Nutrition International's support, the campaign has gained momentum. It is now a huge success and runs twice a year with nearly 100 per cent efficiency."

There is always scope for improvement. While Bangladesh has achieved tremendous progress in conducting a nationwide Vitamin A supplementation, it is essential to mainstream it as a part of the National Immunisation Programme. A successful vitamin A campaign in Bangladesh will give future generations a chance to a healthier and more productive tomorrow.

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DID YOU KNOW?



Tongue fat might be key in obstructive sleep apnea

Losing tongue fat might help improve obstructive sleep apnea (OSA), suggests a small study in the American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine.

Researchers enrolled 67 obese patients with OSA who were undergoing a structured weight loss program or bariatric surgery.

At 6 months, patients who lost a greater percentage of weight overall also had greater reductions in the volume of tongue fat, pterygoid, and total lateral wall (measured by volumetric MRI). After controlling for weight change and clinical covariates, the percentage of tongue fat lost was associated with greater reductions in the apnea-hypopnea index (AHI).

The researchers calculated that reductions in tongue fat accounted for roughly 30% of the total effect of weight loss on AHI reductions, while no other soft tissue changes mediated the association.

They concluded that new treatments that reduce tongue fat should be considered for patients with OSA. They mentioned cryolipolysis as a potential therapy.

HEALTH bulletin



5 practices to help improve the physician-patient connection

Researchers have proposed five practices that could help "foster presence and meaningful connection with patients" during clinical encounters. Reporting in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), the researchers examined studies of interpersonal interventions, analysed physician-patient interactions, and interviewed professionals outside of health care whose jobs required "intense interpersonal interactions."

Ultimately, with the help of experts, they narrowed a list of 31 potential practices to five:

1. "Prepare with intention" — Take time to familiarise yourself with the patient before starting the visit.
2. "Listen intently and completely" — Sit and lean forward as you listen to the patient. Do not interrupt.
3. "Agree on what matters most" — Seek out what the patient cares about most and make these things priorities during the visit.
4. "Connect with the patient's story" — Ask patients about life circumstances; give genuine praise for efforts in specific areas.
5. "Explore emotional cues" — Be alert for verbal and nonverbal cues from the patient and validate the patient's emotions.

The researchers note, "Evaluation and validation of the outcomes associated with implementing the 5 practices is needed, along with system-level interventions to create a supportive environment for implementation."

Sciatica: an obnoxious experience

DR MD FARUQUH ISLAM

Sciatica is the name given to pain caused by irritation of the sciatic nerve. Anything that irritates this nerve can cause pain, ranging from mild to severe. Sciatica is usually caused by a compressed nerve in the lower spine. It commonly occurs by spinal degeneration, such as spinal stenosis or slipped disc. Sciatica most commonly occurs in adults in the 20 to 60 years age group.

There are several factors that increase the likelihood of developing sciatica, which includes pregnancy, overweight, smoking, disc herniation, trauma, slipped vertebra and spinal tumour.

The nature of pain is mild to very severe and can occur suddenly or appear gradually. It is described as a cramp-like pain that can be burning or sharp in nature and is typically felt in the lower back and hip, and going down the back of one leg. It may be associated with sensations such as pins and needles, tingling, numbness and weakness. Pain may be aggravated by specific actions, such as sneezing, coughing, lifting or sitting.

In order to diagnose sciatica, detailed medical history needs to be taken and physical examination including movement analysis and functional limitation needs to be assessed properly. Radiography, computerised tomography (CT scan) or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI scan) may be recommended in some cases in order to assess the nerves, discs and spine in detail.

A person having sciatica may take the following steps to relieve them from the pain:

- Continue all normal activities as much as possible. Avoid activities that causes hurts the back or increase pain
- Regular back stretching exercise as suggested by a physiotherapist
- Apply hot compression in the painful areas for 10 to 15 minutes
- Avoid sitting or standing for a prolonged period
- Make sure you have a good posture when sitting and standing
- Use chairs that provide good back support and are designed to provide a good sitting posture
- A lumbar roll or contoured cushion can help to provide lower back support
- Lose weight if you are overweight
- Quit smoking. Smoking can increase the risk of getting sciatica
- Always practice safe lifting techniques. During lifting, bend the

knees and keep your back straight. Hold the object close to the body. The further away the object is from the body, the more stress is put onto the lower back.

Physical therapy is often very useful in management of sciatica that includes manual exercises, manipulation and mobilisation of spine, neuro-dynamic stretching, sciatic nerve stretching and introduction of core stability exercises to prevent further injury.

There are several factors associated with lower back pain and sciatica is one of them. However, there are a number of measures that can help to prevent it occurring or reduce the likelihood that it will recur. Therefore, accurate examination and early diagnosis will help individuals to prevent and manage sciatica pain and associated symptoms.

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The warning signs of psychotic disorders

Psychotic disorders are a group of mental health conditions that change your sense of reality. They make it hard to know what is real and what is not. When you have these disorders, you might see and hear things that do not exist or believe things that are not true.

The first symptoms can be hard to spot. You might not realise you have a problem right away. So, see a doctor if you notice any of these changes:

- You cannot concentrate or think clearly.
- You are suspicious of people around you.
- You see or hear things no one else can.
- You pull away from loved ones and spend more time alone.
- You have strange new beliefs, and no one can convince you they are untrue.
- You stop bathing or caring for yourself.

How are they treated? You will have the best chance of recovery if you get treated during your first outbreak of symptoms.

Your doctor may suggest medicine and talk therapy. A therapist helps you understand your thoughts and behaviours and teaches you healthier ways to manage your problems. Antipsychotic drugs can help ease hallucinations and delusions. Your doctor may prescribe antidepressants if you also have symptoms of depression, like despair and sadness.

Life with a psychotic disorder

Lean on friends, family members, your doctor, and a support group in your community to help you get through treatment. Find out all you can about your condition and what to expect. Take the time you need to recover. Don't try to push yourself too hard. If you have a problem with drugs or alcohol, get help from your doctor or a substance abuse programme.

Source: WebMD



6 tips to get relief from joint pain in WINTER

DRESS WARMLY

If it's cold outside, keep aching hands warm with gloves, and add extra layers over knees & legs

HYDRATE

Even mild dehydration might make you more sensitive to pain, according to study results published in the September 2015

LOSE WEIGHT

A 2013 article in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) highlighted the significant improvement people with knee arthritis can get from weight loss, from diet, & exercise

ADD FISH OIL

The Arthritis Foundation recommends up to 2.6 grams of fish oil capsules twice a day. Make sure to let your doctor know if you try omega-3s, as they can increase the risk for bruising or bleeding

GET A MASSAGE

Getting an hour long massage once a week for at least eight weeks was shown to reduce pain, according to research in the June 2015

LET WARM WATER COMFORT YOU

Swimming in a heated pool is both great exercise & soothing to joints. You can also get relief from warm baths, according to the Arthritis Foundation.



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