

# Healthcare in urban slums: do we care?

Tofail Md Alamgir Azad and Md Abdul Baten

Although the best service providers from public, private and NGO sectors are active in Dhaka city, most of the slum dwellers have a very limited access to modern facilities due to financial inabilities, lack of information and awareness about how to utilise the services.

Like most other common public services, healthcare facilities are not readily available in the slums, especially those situated on public land. A few NGOs and some private services provide the primary and maternal healthcare supports in the slums. But the patients with acute and chronic illnesses are facing major challenges to access healthcare. Moreover, they suffer from frequent diseases due to their unhygienic living conditions and low level of knowledge.

As NGO services are mainly



available during the office hours, more than 45% of patients are visiting local pharmacies, quacks and traditional healers. For the extreme situations of acute and chronic illnesses, they go to the public hospitals. Most often they are too late for many serious cases.

Many slum dwellers have also shared their negative experiences about the services of

public hospitals. They faced different kinds of social stigma such as ignorance and rough dealings from the service providers and demanding illegal fees from the lower class employees or local agents especially to get admission at the hospitals.

Besides the direct cash expenditures, they face indirect loss due to the sickness of any

individual such loss of working days, salary cut and losing jobs with some other serious consequences.

Primary healthcare and awareness rising activities should be incorporated with significant health interventions covering the acute and chronic illnesses of the slum dwellers for protecting their right to access healthcare. Specialist doctors

can visit at the local static clinics at the slums at least 2 days per week. Specialised private hospitals can be encouraged to provide some free or subsidised services. Besides the formal referral systems, organisational follow up supports are needed for ensuring the proper services from the public hospitals.

Voucher system can be effective for covering medicine, diagnostics and other relevant expenditure. The local government authority (such as ward commissioners) can issue special health card to receive a totally free or subsidised health supports from public or specialised private hospitals. Micro health insurances for the poor and extreme poor people may be one of the best options to improve health situation.

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## OFF TRACK

### Laughter as a form of exercise



Is laughter a kind of exercise? That offbeat question is at the heart of a new study published in Proceedings of the Royal Society B that showed that laughter is just not an emotional effect but also a good exercise.

Researchers at Oxford University recruited a large group of undergraduate men and women to laugh and see the effect of laughing in our body.

They said that most of us probably think of laughter, if we think of it at all, as a response to something funny — as, in effect, an emotion. But laughter is fundamentally a physical action. Laughter involves the repeated, forceful exhalation of breath from the lungs. The muscles of the diaphragm (a curtain that separates chest from belly and takes part in inhaling air) have to work very hard. Something similar may happen when people exercise together.

We have all heard the phrase "laughter is the best medicine". It is not just a response to something funny — as, in effect, an emotion, also a tool to stay healthy. If you prefer exercising alone, perhaps entertaining yourself with a good joke is a good option.

So, laugh until it hurts.

Source: The New York Times

## HEALTH bulletin

**Walking, cycling may ease cancer-related fatigue**

People who have been treated for cancer often have lingering fatigue, but regular walking or cycling might help boost their energy, according to a UK study appeared in The Cochrane Library that looked at more than two thousand people.

**Antibiotics in pregnancy tied to asthma in kids**

Children whose mothers took antibiotics while they were pregnant were slightly more likely than other kids to develop asthma in a new Danish study published in The Journal of Paediatrics.

The results don't prove that antibiotics caused the higher asthma risk, but they support a current theory that the body's own "friendly" bacteria have a role in whether a child develops asthma, and antibiotics can disrupt those beneficial bugs.

## INTERVIEW

# More hope for the patients after liver transplant

DR TAREQ SALAHUDDIN

End stage liver diseases are no longer a helpless situation. There are solutions to the terminal stage patients to get a liver transplant. Over time, the procedure is becoming well practiced and the survival of the patients is increasing.

Renowned liver transplant surgeon Dr K C Tan of The Asian Centre for Liver Diseases & Transplantation in Singapore recently visited Bangladesh to attend a Hepatology Conference shared his views with Star Health.

Dr Tan says that liver transplant gives lot more hope now to the liver disease patients who would die in the past. Now more people are aware that liver transplant is possible. So more people are taking the advantage.

As the technique has improved and as there is better medication now available, if patients get liver transplant in time, the chance of survival is more than ever before — about 80-85% in case of adults and more than 90% in case of children.

The most exciting thing that



Dr K C Tan (right) poses with Mr Mozammel Huq Bhuiyan who got liver transplant in 2011 and now surviving well.

happened over the last one year is a rapid development of new medication especially for Hepatitis C. Dr Tan suggested that patients with Hepatitis C should get treated as soon as possible before they get liver cirrhosis.

Mr Mozammel Huq Bhuiyan got infected by Hepatitis C virus since 1996 and came to a terminal stage. Over time, his situation got worse and he had almost no hope of life; he was returned by some doctors even. But he got liver transplanted in 2011 in Singapore and now surviving well. He just

got a new life and experienced no problems following the operative procedure.

Liver transplant is not a business of one surgeon only, but it depends on a whole team to perform the procedure. Dr Tan opined that the most critical part is managing the patient after operation. So maintaining the standard of sophisticated care is very important.

Dr Tan hopes about Bangladesh that the doctors here will be able to perform the procedure.

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## Int. Hepatology Conference highlighted disease burden in the country

STAR HEALTH REPORT

Recently International Hepatology Conference organised by the Hepatology Society was held in Dhaka. Eminent experts across the world attended the conference.

Although liver diseases pose a big problem to the country's health, many of these are preventable by improving personal hygiene and sanitation. Creating mass awareness is therefore very important.

Both hepatitis B and hepatitis C are major health concerns for us. 5-8% of our population are infected with hepatitis B virus while less than 1% suffers from hepatitis C. Every year about 1,50,000 newly born children are infected with hepatitis B and at least 20,000 to 23,000 die as a consequence annually.

There is dire need of safe blood transfusion as hepatitis B and C viruses are transmitted through blood and blood products and as no vaccine against hepatitis C is available yet.



## Knowing for better living

Low-birth-weight, Infections and Asphyxia (lack of oxygen at birth) are the leading causes of neonatal deaths!

- Initiate breastfeeding within one hour of birth
- Avoid prelacteal foods like honey or water
- Ensure adequate nutrition for mother
- Ensure exclusive breastfeeding for first six months
- Ensure postnatal care for mother & neonate

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