

WOMEN'S HEALTH
www.maya.com.bd



24/7 help at hand for women



ASSUMPTIONS. When it comes to technology, we assume a lot of things. We assume that with education and access to technology, anyone and everyone should be able to access information. We assume that women can openly talk to their maternal/matriarchal support system or that all women have a support system to begin with. We assume that information is readily available and simply just there.

These assumptions are the building blocks to problems than to solutions especially for women's access to information and services to better their lives and livelihoods. Seeing her own mother survive breast cancer, shifting between London and Dhaka during her pregnancy and not finding any community or information on either cancer or pregnancy, Ivy H Russell wanted to break these assumptions and created what is now known as the web portal www.maya.com.bd.

Maya.com.bd initially started with the idea of providing women of Bangladesh with high quality medical content by localising information from their knowledge partner National Health Services of the UK. But it wasn't just about dissemination of information but creating an online community. How to create a space where women can talk about not just their health issues but their emotional problems, social challenges, and legal dilemmas? They created a space where women can ask anything without feeling judged or stigmatised.

With a team of medical doctors, students and legal experts working on localising Maya's content online and making the website more interactive, the idea of a help service slowly developed among the team members, resulting to the introduction of a their highly successful web application "Maya Apa Ki Bole?"

With just a simple email address, anyone from anywhere can anonymously post a question in either Bangla or English on the web. Tailor-made answers to each question are provided in 48-hours by doctors, lawyers, and counselors depending on the nature of the question. Maya team takes great pride in creating a non-judgemental space which has led to especially young women (and men) to

send in their queries on everything from emotional well-being, sex education, contraception and family planning, intimate partner abuse, divorce, or even forced early marriage.

The Maya Apa Q&A platform is a great testament to the need for quality information and services in Bangladesh. That information is usually scattered or inaccessible for people who often times feel lost when trying to find the basics.

Young people in particular, between the age groups of 15-24, are highly active on Maya Apa (the next group being 24-35), giving an insight on how the limited amount of information and guidance that is available for the youth of Bangladesh on issues of sexual reproductive health, relationships, career, and emotional well-being. Because the platform is anonymous, users post a lot of details about their unique situations which can be read by other users. An online community is built. By reading others' situation,



many people come forward, finding the strength to share similar stories/experiences, becoming a part of the solution.

Along with over 10,000 questions answered, Maya Apa answers always include further reading and references that are available on the Maya site with auto-suggest feature in the pipeline, encouraging users to learn more about their conditions and have greater access to information to empower themselves.

Currently, Maya.com has five young doc-

tors and two lawyers, taking turns researching and answering every question posted on the site. Under the guidance of their Head of Content, Shahana Siddiqui, the team develops high quality, local, easy to read, bilingual, "self-help" content with relevant references.

Dr Kazi Mashfia Fardeen, Dr Gulrukh Nawsheen Khan and Dr Naomi Ferdous Mirza are the three main medical specialists in Maya with two more assistants to specialists, rounding up the medical team while the legal questions are provided on a pro bono basis from Tasnuva Shelly and Moin Ghani.

An aspect worth highlighting here is the relative young age of the medical specialists, all of whom are recent graduates. The young, approachable and tech savvy doctors of Maya are part of the first generation of ICT based doctors in Bangladesh, who are changing the doctor-patient interface in the country by providing medically sound and socially sensitive health and

tional well being.

Medical issues are extremely important and one shouldn't hold back simply because they feel shy, embarrassed or afraid of what reaction their questions will generate. Maya eliminates all those doubts and deals with medical issues as they should be dealt with.

It is worth highlighting that medical issues aren't Maya's only concern. In recent times, the website has broadened its horizons and plays a key role in women empowerment, by providing knowledge and taking actions.

Maya has linked up with lawyers, adding them to their outside liaisons comprising of psychiatrists, gynaecologists, general physicians and many more. One of the main reasons for bringing lawyers into the equation was the lack of information people had regarding domestic abuse and unequal treatment, a very real yet hidden feature of every country in the world, be it the most developed or the least. Maya has teamed up with numerous organisations too which deal with women's rights, steadily building a highly interlinked network which provides a solid support system for all spheres, in line with Maya's original thinking. In a span of a few years, Maya has indeed come a long way.

The next step for the Maya team is launching their very own app in partnership with BRAC. This app aims to bridge the gap between knowledge and knowledge-seeker even further, with your every query or problem now just a few keystrokes away. A woman has a question, she wants an answer. She asks on Maya and we ensure that she receives an answer from an expert in that field. Simple. The founder is proud to add that the app is built by two female engineers from BUET and it's made 100 percent in Bangladesh.

Photo courtesy: Maya.com.bd