



LIFEBUOY FRIENDSHIP HOSPITAL

The remote healthcare solution on water

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Healthcare is a fundamental human right, yet access to quality medical facilities remains a challenge in Bangladesh. Especially at the chars (river islands) in northern Bangladesh, where there is little to no road connectivity, over 10 million people suffer from the inaccessibility of traditional healthcare. Launched 20 years ago, Lifebuoy Friendship Hospital (LFH) aims to address the lack of healthcare in these difficult-to-access areas. This unique solution, introduced for the first time in Bangladesh, travels on water, providing medical services and medicines to marginalised communities. Let's take a look at how this travelling hospital on water functions.

The beginning

In 2002, a river barge brought from France to Bangladesh was converted into a hospital ship, and thus, the journey of LFH began. Zaved Akhtar, CEO and Managing Director of Unilever Bangladesh shared, "Realising healthcare challenges in many remote parts of Bangladesh, we partnered with the NGO Friendship 20 years ago to

start LFH." Since its inauguration, the primary objective has been to provide quality healthcare to remote communities living in the chars of Bangladesh. As these areas are cut off from the mainland, it is difficult to access them and inhabitants have thus far needed proper updated healthcare services.

Operational areas

LFH has thus far anchored in Dhaka, Manikgonj, Gopalganj, Munshigonj, Pabna, Pirojpur, Sirajganj, Bogura, Kurigram, Gaibandha and Jamalpur districts - delivering free healthcare services to the unaddressed communities. As per Zaved, LFH provides modern medical care to underprivileged people living in remote areas. Being free of cost, no one is excluded from getting the healthcare they deserve.

The hospital is open every day of the week throughout the entire year, except for the few days when it moves from one location to another. The local patients who have benefitted from LFH appreciate the service they receive daily, as accessing quality healthcare was much more difficult before. LFH being

remote also means that it can provide its services to many different regions.

Equipment

LFH is fully equipped with a primary health care unit. It also has secondary health care facilities, two operation theatres, a pathological laboratory and a digitalised X-ray room. The LFH team comprises doctors, nurses and other medical staff who offer a wide range of services, including gynaecology, dentistry, ophthalmology, paediatrics and general medicine. The ship can accommodate up to 30 people, primarily staff and crew members as well. Altogether, it is notable that a floating hospital can fit many pieces of equipment and individuals and has been sustained for many years.

Services provided

At LFH, a permanent team of expert medical groups, including general doctors, eye technicians, dental technicians (supervised by a dental surgeon), paramedics and nurses provide general and basic secondary healthcare. Along with medical care, LFH offers free medication and

health education to promote awareness of preventative measures.

Specialised medical camps are also arranged through an expert pool of local and foreign doctors who volunteer their time and respond to the specific needs in terms of essential tertiary services, such as repair of cleft palate, gynaecological operations, fractures and burn contractures. Other basic eye and ENT services via a specialised medical camp approach are also provided at LFH.

Over the past 20 years, LFH has catered to over 6,57,000 patients with about 1,066,600 healthcare services. Among them, more than 5,26,000 were for primary care and about 4,65,300 were for secondary care. The LFH, as the first of its kind in the nation, takes advantage of the river lines which constitute the majority of Bangladesh.

Being a river-based country, having access to free medical services even in remote areas has been a huge boon for local inhabitants. Its unique geographical isolation coupled with healthcare innovation has helped

LFH sustain itself since its inception.

