

The Fight Against Malnutrition

Dr. Sujata Goda started working in Palghar and nearby villages in 1990s and continues to date

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Dr Sujata Goda

With the resolve of improving the health of pregnant women and malnourished children, Dr. Sujata Goda is spearheading the health facilities in 25 villages in the Vikramgad taluka and working to eradicate malnutrition in the region. Her efforts are focused towards achieving sustained freedom from malnutrition in these villages. Let's know about her efforts.

Dr. Sujata began by gaining confidence of 50 women from the tribal community to be trained as health workers and is treating over 16,000 patients in the Bhopoli and 25 other villages in the region. Her warm presence in the community for over last 20 years has gained the trust of the people. Her efforts have changed the way community looked at doctors, they have started accepting them and are even



seeking treatment from her. They are even ready to change their lifestyle with better understanding for better health.

Dr Sujata Goda is also involved in women empowerment, improving health of adolescent girls and children, capacity and skill building of local women through self help groups, environment awareness and conservation and also participates in village development.

After Dr. M. L. Dhawale's sad untimely demise in 1987, his students and patients formed a non-profit called Dr. M L. Dhawale Memorial Trust with the intent of providing health services and for education & research in Homeopathy. Dr. Sujata became a member of this Trust. Until 1989 till she finished her MD she worked in Trust's clinic in various slums colonies of Mumbai. While working with these communities she understood growing health crisis in the region and found her life's goal. She decided to work with the rural population through the Trust along with her husband Dr. Chandrashekhar Goda.

In 1990, they started working in surrounding villages of Palghar. They came across many problems in the villages. The main problem was a lack of medical services, superstition and utter distrust in modern medicine. Dr. Sujata found

a perfect way to bridge this gap by training local tribal women who could read and write to be the health workers for the Trust. She went from village to village, spoke with the women, counselled and motivated them and established a trust with them. Today, more than 50 such trained health workers are working in the region. These health workers are capable of treating minor illness, identifying emergency situations for quick referral, providing pregnant women with the routine supplements & medication. Dr. Sujata focused on the problem of mother's malnutrition, as she knew this was the key to improve the health of the community. She held regular formal and informal meetings in the villages to discuss proper nutrition, need of calcium and iron supplements, basic hygiene and its importance in fighting epidemics and pandemics. This resulted in more and more women going to an hospital for delivery. This had a positive impact on birth weight and reduced mortality. In last few years Dr. Sujata and team has done over 2000 deliveries in the tribal pockets of Palghar.

Dr. Goda realized that the main reason behind child malnutrition was young-age pregnancies and severely malnourished mothers. To mitigate that, she started work with young adolescent girls and teaching them about mensuration and disadvantages of marriage before



certain age. Progressively, the girls themselves are now coaxing their parents against early marriage.

Dr. Sujata and her health workers are working in 25 villages and over 150 hamlets, fully aware of the fact that eradicating malnutrition will need work on at least two to three generations. Their aim is to make these villages malnutrition free. To achieve this, Sujata and her team closely monitor pregnant women ensuring that they get all essential supplements during pregnancy, their routine check-ups are done and they are counselled about child birth and post-delivery care.

The Trust's ten bedded hospital in Bhopoli provides health services at virtually no cost to thousands of patients in the region. While good health is important, to sustain it and to improve quality of food intake, financial upliftment is extremely critical. To financially empower the women in the villages, the Trust started Self-Help Groups. The SHGs inculcate a habit of regular saving culminating into micro-finance loans for setting up small productive activities or for helping in emergencies. The SHGs was also a good platform to spread the awareness of various Government schemes, explain importance of education to their children and general health counselling. The Trust started a Nursing skill education program. The graduates

of these programs are now working in various clinics and hospitals throughout the area. She is now writing a book for the curriculum of this program in easily comprehensible & local language.

Dr. Sujata is also involved in various community welfare projects such as promoting organic farming, conservation of environment, water conservation etc. Events to preserve and promote local art and culture are conducted. Special attention is given to preventing addiction, as that is a route for many ills in the society. Sujata is also involved in training the new resident doctors at Dhawale hospital. She is currently working on a research project related to treating scabies, which is very prevalent in the area, through Homoeopathy.

Dr Sujata Goda has worked relentlessly for last 20 years on improving health & life of the tribal women, children and men. She very humbly acknowledges the credit of all these achievements with everyone in her team.

We salute Dr. Sujata for bringing dignity to the lives of tribal residents of Palghar!

