

- Providing rational medical care free of cost to nearly 36 thousand survivors of the December 1984 disaster and those poisoned by contamination of ground water by Union Carbide's chemical wastes - through modern medicine, ayurveda and yoga,
- Carrying out community health work in a population of over 30,000 affected people,
- Conducting research on the long-term health impact of the disaster in a cohort of nearly 100,000 individuals,
- Growing over 100 medicinal plants organically and manufacturing 85 ayurvedic medicines,
- Documenting relevant scientific, legal, corporate and other information on the continuing disaster in Bhopal,
- Raising awareness on issues of environmental health locally and globally.

INTRODUCTION

Thirty six years after the Union Carbide gas disaster in Bhopal, over 120,000 people still suffer severe illnesses due to the damage caused by the gases to almost every system of their bodies. Moreover, 100,000 people have been drinking contaminated ground water for the last 14-20 years and the numbers are increasing.

Despite massive expenditures, the medical care of the exposed people continues to be terribly inadequate. Union Carbide continues to refuse to share medical information on the leaked gases and symptomatic treatment has come to be the mainstay of medical care of the survivors at government hospitals. Following from this it is not uncommon to find damages caused by gas exposure to be compounded by the treatment received.

The Sambhavna Clinic opened its doors on September 2, 1996. The Clinic, run by the Sambhavna Trust, an independent, community-based, non-governmental medical initiative concerned with the long-term welfare of the survivors, offers an innovative blend of modern and traditional therapies free of cost to the survivors.

LOCATION

The Clinic is located in the middle of communities that were most severely affected by the December 1984 gas disaster. Being 400 m south of the Union Carbide factory, the Clinic is also close to the communities next to the factory whose chemical wastes have contaminated their groundwater. The Clinic is built on a 2 acre plot including a herbal garden. The building incorporates rain water harvesting, solar energy, waste water recycling, solar medical waste disposal, non-toxic construction material and other eco-sensitive features.

WHO COMES FOR CARE

Only those with a history of exposure to Carbide's gases and those who can provide proof that they have been exposed to contaminated ground water are registered for care at the Clinic. Those born to gas affected parents until December 1986 are also registered because Sambhavna's research has documented significant ill-effects among such people. About twice as many women as men visit the Clinic.

CLINICAL DATA

Since 1996, we have registered close to 36,000 chronically ill people from affected communities. Data from our health records system is computerised, providing important information for guiding our work and improving our care for the survivors. Currently we have a networked system of registration and follow-up with continuous updating of clinical data at different points.

ALLOPATHIC CARE WITHOUT HARM

Sambhavna's allopathic care team currently consists of a general physician and a gynaecologist. Their work is supported by our in-house laboratory with facilities for biochemical, microscopic and microbiological investigations. In providing care through modern medicine we adhere to the policy of "first do no harm" by screening out potentially harmful drugs.

POSSIBILITIES IN AYURVEDA

The epidemic of exposure-induced diseases was a windfall for pharmaceutical corporations. Ayurveda, the indigenous system of health care that uses herbal medicines to help the body heal itself, is Sambhavna's way to help survivors reduce their intake of synthetic drugs that are often found to be doing more harm than good. Our ayurveda physician and two panchakarma therapists provide treatment through herbal medicines and through procedures of detoxification such as medicated oil massage, steam bath, medicinal oil stream and medicinal enema.

GROWING AND MAKING MEDICINES

More than 100 species of medicinal plants are grown on a 1 acre garden next to the clinic building. The garden provides fresh herbs for preparation of medicines and also inspires people to start medicinal plant gardens in their communities or at home. The on-site medicine making unit in Sambhavna manufactures 85 different kinds of Ayurvedic powders, oils, decoctions and pills.

DRUG-FREE CARE THROUGH YOGA

At Sambhavna, survivors are instructed in different yoga postures [asanas], breathing exercises [pranayama] and cleansing actions [shodhana] depending on the nature of their symptoms. Yoga therapy has been found to be particularly useful for treatment of breathlessness, backache, joint pains, menstrual irregularities, diabetes, anxiety and insomnia. We have carried out research that objectively demonstrate the effectiveness of Yoga therapy in the treatment of some of the exposure induced health problems.

RESEARCH

Research on the health consequences of exposure to Carbide's poisons was wound up in 1994 by the Indian Council of Medical Research. Despite its resource constraints Sambhavna has made significant contributions to the scientific knowledge on the long-term health consequences of the disaster. Several of our research studies have been published in national and international journals.

DOCUMENTATION

Sambhavna maintains what is probably the most comprehensive collection of original source material related to the Bhopal disaster at the library in the Clinic. Materials include newspaper clippings from December 1984 onwards, medical and scientific research papers, legal transcripts, government publications, corporate documents, pamphlets and posters from local and international campaigns as well as books on a variety of health related subjects. The library is frequently used by researchers, journalists, activists and survivors in addition to Sambhavna staff and volunteers.

CONNECTION WITH THE COMMUNITY

Sambhavna's Community Health Workers identify people in need of care every day, follow-up on a thousand or so people receiving care at the clinic each month, and collect information on health in the community. They educate people about common health issues and their solutions, run a very successful TB control program, organise community-based screening for cervical cancer, train people to be community health leaders, set up voluntary health committees in different communities, and help people organise to address local health threats like contaminated water.

STAFF

The 60 staff members at the Clinic include doctors, therapists, data processors, laboratory technicians, gardeners, community health workers, researchers, drug dispensers, sanitary workers, and security guards. Among the staff 29 are women, 40 are under 40, 6 are qualified in medicine (2 of whom are specialists), 10 are post-graduates and 17 are graduates. 29 staff members are themselves survivors of the disaster and 5 staff members have been exposed to both gas and contaminated ground water. Volunteers from around the world contribute significantly to the Clinic's work.

MANAGEMENT

The Sambhavna Clinic is run by a 6-member Board of Trustees who are scientists, doctors, editors and activists who have long been

involved with medical and other aspects of the disaster. A Steering Committee elected by staff and a Coordinator look after the day-to-day running of the Clinic. Decision-making, evaluation, planning and review of Clinic activities is based on equality, full participation, and consensus at the weekly staff meetings. Complaints and suggestions are actively sought from all those attending the Clinic.

FUNDS

Sambhavna does not accept money from governments or corporations. All funds required to run the Sambhavna Trust Clinic come from individual donations. A large part of Sambhavna's funds come from over 30,000 individuals in the UK who respond to advertisements placed by the UK-based charity *Bhopal Medical Appeal* in British newspapers. Our contributors include people from all walks of life - school children, workers, academics, professionals, artists, writers and parents. The accounts of the Sambhavna Trust are audited annually and are open to public scrutiny.

NO MORE BHOPAL

Through its involvement with the gas affected communities and with the global community, Sambhavna is working to stop the medical disaster in Bhopal and to prevent such tragedies from happening again. We organise health camps and workshops in the communities. We work with survivors' organisations fighting for better health care. Sambhavna connects with doctors and researchers in Bhopal and all over the world.

AWARDS

In July 1999, Sambhavna Trust was awarded the Japanese Tajiri Muneaki Prize for 1999, for "*meritorious services rendered to the victims of the Bhopal gas disaster*".

In September 2001, members of the Sambhavna Trust and Clinic were presented with the "*Inner Flame Award 2001*" by the Governor of Madhya Pradesh, for "*outstanding humanitarian work and excellence in deed*".

In January 2002, Sambhavna Trust was awarded the MEAD 2001

Award by the Margaret Mead 2001 Centennial Committee of the Institute for Intercultural Studies, New York and Whole Earth magazine, San Francisco. This international Award honours groups that reflect Margaret Mead's statement: "*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.*"

In May 2009 The International Regenerative Health Care Award was awarded to Sambhavna Trust for "*outstanding community healing work*" by Health Care Without Harm, USA.

POSSIBILITIES IN SAMA BHAVNA

Our name 'Sambhavna' means "possibility". Read as "sama" and "bhavna" it means similar feelings or compassion. We strongly believe in the possibilities of compassion. As we have said, the clinic runs on donations by compassionate individuals and much significant work is done by volunteers who have come from France, England, Switzerland, Canada, USA, Sweden, Iceland and other countries, as well as from all over India.

For more information please contact:

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