Novel School Health Initiative

Shridhar Dwivedi, Om P Yadava, Deepa Chugh

ABSTRACT

India is currently facing an epidemic of noncommunicable diseases. This epidemic can possibly be halted by creating awareness about these diseases and inculcating a healthy lifestyle among adolescent children. Keeping this in mind, National Heart Institute has started a ‘Novel School Health Initiative’ in which senior faculty gives illustrative lectures on a healthy lifestyle like ‘you and your heart’, ‘menstrual hygiene’ (exclusively for girls) and ‘personal hygiene’ giving power point presentations to class VIII/IX students. There were no financial implications for the schools.

Twenty Delhi schools including public, private and central schools were included in this program to make it more objective. Lectures were preceded and followed by an objective questionnaire. Though a large number of students knew about healthy lifestyle and heart disease in general, the awareness level increased considerably following the lecture. The fact that the students received these lectures with enthusiasm and their level of awareness increased in the post-test evaluation, indicates that these students will be an awakened lot and will try to follow a healthy lifestyle.

The long-term effect of such lectures needs periodical evaluation. This model can be replicated in other schools by neighborhood medical college/ hospitals in the entire country.

Keywords: Healthy lifestyle, Menstrual hygiene, Personal hygiene, School, Tobacco.

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DESCRIPTION AND FINDING OF PROJECT

Quite realizing the rapidly surging pandemic of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like hypertension, diabetes mellitus (T2DM), obesity, coronary artery disease (CAD), stroke and cancer in urban as well as in rural India, National Heart Institute (NHI) New Delhi took upon itself voluntarily and consciously an initiative to educate and sensitize young school children belonging to class VIII and class IX about the above problems and steps to prevent these by observing simple lifestyle measures.1 The project started in April 2016. We would like to mention that similar efforts were made by Hamdard Institute of Medical Sciences and Research (HIMSR), Jamia Hamdard, New Delhi, which started in 2013.2 A series of lectures on six subjects viz ‘lifestyle, you and your heart’, ‘adolescent obesity/diabetes mellitus, ‘tuberculosis’ and personal hygiene’ were delivered by us. A special topic on ‘menstrual hygiene’ was chosen exclusively for girl students. Senior faculty from NHI and HIMSR offered themselves for this initiative.

In order to provide an academic framework for such lectures NHI has published a ‘School Health Book’ containing relevant lessons pertaining to healthy lifestyle, prevention of hypertension, diabetes, and tuberculosis, ideal posture, personal hygiene, menstrual hygiene, etc.3 Education Department of National Capital Government of Delhi lent support for these lectures in some 12 schools on pilot basis. So far we have conducted twenty lectures in different schools of national capital. These schools represent a mix of all socioeconomic segments of society, public schools, central schools, and Delhi government boys and girls schools. The lectures are given both in English and Hindi using power point presentations with a lot of pictures and graphics. Each lecture is about thirty minutes in duration with 10 minutes for interaction. Continuing this journey, we also organized a lecture on ‘healthy lifestyle’ in government blind school, New Delhi. This time we took help of ‘a documentary’ prepared by World Health Organization-South-East Asia Regional Office (WHO-SEARO) in which NHI had given its academic and professional inputs. Its main emphasis was on prevention of tobacco use.4 We were very pleased when the Principal of the blind school personally thanked us for giving a talk against tobacco use because gutkha consumption was very high in their hostel. Very often on a surprise check-up, gutkha-surti pouches used to be found with inmates. The principal added that our lecture and docudrama will go a long way in controlling this menace among hostel students.
To assess the impact of this initiative objectively, we designed a pre-test and post-test evaluation questionnaire containing five core questions drawn from the two lectures given on that day. So, far this exercise has been done in three schools out of which two were exclusively girls and one co-ed public school. The preliminary results have been interesting (Tables 1 and 2).

The results are important on several counts. A large number of classes VIII, IX students knew what a healthy lifestyle means. Our lecture increased this awareness in another 5–10% of students, taking the awareness level to above 90%. However, what matters most is how many of them actually follow healthy lifestyle practices, like doing physical exercise, participating in sports, consuming healthy food, etc., in their day-to-day routine. One can only hope for the best; at least those who have not already started tobacco chewing or smoking, will not fall prey to this habit in future after attending these lectures and those who are using tobacco products, may seriously think of quitting tobacco.

We wish to take this initiative more aggressively by covering all government schools in national capital region (NCR) and involving many more faculties from different medical schools/health institutions of the capital city of Delhi and neighborhood. It has to be a movement to create 100% awareness among school children about healthy lifestyle, personal hygiene, and civility so that the rapidly spreading epidemic of NCDs can be halted effectively.

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**REFERENCES**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Table 1: Pre- and post-lecture assessment in girl's school</strong></th>
<th><strong>Table 2: Pre- and post-lecture assessment in Co-ed Public School</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Girl's school (n = 96)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Public School (n = 110)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
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<td>pre-lecture</td>
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<td>pre-lecture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Menstrual hygiene</td>
<td>71.6%</td>
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<td>Healthy lifestyle</td>
<td>74.4%</td>
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