

Aushadham Charity Trust and Vikare Dental Clinic

By Dr T.L. Vishnuprashad

PROJECT DETAILS: The project envisages dental care for the young rural poor. It has been found that the farming activities leave the rural adults with little time for any other interaction or care for their children unless and until it is an emergency. That makes dental health one of the last in their priorities. In our numerous dental camps this neglect of dental health in childhood is reflected in the adult population. Even in the young adult female population where awareness of aesthetics is high, thanks to the media's reach in villages, we find loss of most of the molars and premolars it is only when the upper anteriors are affected that the search for a dental surgeon begins. Loss of man hours and the expenses involved in dental treatment then impacts their economy in many many ways which will be more in the realm of a good economic survey. Below is a brief scenario in the villages with the hope that members can get a broader picture of the ground realities.

At Aushadham and Vikare Dental Clinic we have tried to approach this problem in two ways: through Aushadham Trust we have set up a rural clinic at Tenkodipakkam village which serves as a base clinic for around sixteen primary middle and high schools in the area. We have coordinated with the village heads and conduct a screening camp for all the children in the school. A database of all the dental problems is made. The children are brought to the clinic, class by class, and their dental problems are treated. At the same time they are taught oral hygiene care. At this point kits having toothbrushes and pastes from Colgate India are distributed. The children are revisited every six months to evaluate their oral upkeep.

We have encountered three problems:

1. Treatment which involves extractions or any other surgical problem cannot be done without the parents' consent. The teachers try to motivate the parents but the response is poor, this is because they do not like to lose a day's wages by spending what they feel is not an emergency.
- 2.
3. It is only from schools that are within a radius of 3 kms that the children are sent to the clinic. Other schools are afraid to take the responsibility of sending children and generally send a note to the parents. As the parents are illiterate this usually does not have any response.
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5. At present the clinic is run from a government building. The maintenance of this building is very poor. We cannot do repairs without the permission of the govt. A plot of land was purchased and construction was started but due to resource crunch that has been kept in abeyance.
6. Vikare Dental Clinic conducts rural camps every third Sunday in many villages around Pondicherry and Tamilnadu. We also conduct camps, in a limited number of schools, especially where children of weaker sections of society are studying and for one school for the mentally retarded. We have kept this restricted as we try to visit the same schools at least once in one academic year.

The problem here is that the camps are more a one-time affair and long term results are poor. Keeping in mind the above problems we decided that most of the problems would be solved by having a mobile dental van. We propose to have an advanced tour programme. At the beginning of every month four village schools will be identified. For three days in a week the van will be stationed or go to the school. The principal of the school will be given advance intimation so that the parents of the children are present in case consent is required. Treatment for all pedodontic and orthodontic will be done free or at minimum costs depending on the funds available. If funds generated are inadequate we propose to use the same mobile van for treating children in residential schools and the funds thus made available used in our charity.

LOCATION: The trust is basically an extension of the dental clinic. Both are in the same place. The address is as follows: Vikare Dental Clinic, 42 Lawspet Main Road, Near Rajiv Gandhi Signal, Pakkumudianpet, Pondicherry-605008, India.

TARGET GROUP: School children especially in the villages, and also the rural poor in and around Pondicherry, Tindivanam, Villupuram areas. Aushadham trust was set up to cater exclusively for two villages (Omanthur and Tenkodipakkam) which we have adopted.

FINANCIAL REPORT: This is an ongoing project which we are trying to take to the next level of dental care. However, I will provide a breakup of costs shortly. Also a projection of the costs when we start with our next phase.

PROJECT STATUS: We run a free rural dental centre, which we attend twice a week the clinic conducts camps once a month in some village.