Dr. Zafrullah Chowdhury

Trustee, Gonoshasthaya Kendra, Bangladesh

Dr. Zafrullah Chowdhury is Projects’ Coordinator of Gonoshasthaya Kendra, a Programme of Gonoshasthaya Kendra Public Charitable Trust set up in 1972.

Academic Qualifications and Training
- M.B.B.S. with distinction in Surgery, University of Dhaka, 1964
- Primary FRCS, Royal College of Surgeons, UK 1970
- Honorary FCGP, College of General Practitioners, Bangladesh, 1990
- Postgraduate training in general, orthopedic and vascular surgery in United Kingdom from 1965–1971. When he was to sit for final FRCS examination, the war of liberation for Bangladesh began and Zafrullah Chowdhury left England to participate in the liberation struggle. He was involved in setting up Bangladesh Field Hospital, the first field hospital for freedom fighters and the refugees. It was located at the border between Tripura State of India and the then East Pakistan (Bangladesh). This was a 480-bed hospital run by a team of Bangladeshi doctors, medical students and volunteer workers.

Activities
In 1972 Zafrullah Chowdhury took on the challenge of developing an effective rural health care delivery system based on his experience of running a field hospital with young women and men with no previous medical training and Gonoshasthaya Kendra (GK) was set up. The first concept paper on this “Basic Health Care in Rural Area” presented in Dhaka in April 1972 was to later become the basis for international discussions on Primary Health Care. The experience of Gonoshasthaya Kendra became the basis of one of the main working papers on which the Alma Ata Declaration of the World Health Organisation was framed.

Gonoshasthaya Kendra is a multi-faceted community and development programme encompassing activities ranging from agricultural cooperatives, community schools, primary health care centres and hospital, women’s vocational training centres to economic enterprises to help finance social activities of GK Trust.

Gonoshasthaya Pharmaceuticals, Gonoshasthaya Intra-venous Fluid Units, Gonoshasthaya Basic Antibiotics Production Units, Gono Mudran (Gonoshasthaya Printing Press), Gonoshasthaya Foods Limited, Gonoshasthaya Tath Limited (Handloom weaving) are some of the income generating units owned fully by the Gonoshasthaya Public Charitable Trust.

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Gonoshasthaya Kendra has for the last 30 years worked on community health services. It has successfully introduced innovative community health care services in Bangladesh, especially in the field of paramedical training and domiciliary services achieving low maternal mortality (MMR) and infant mortality rates (IMR). In most GK’s operational areas, MMR and IMR is between $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of the national average. Family planning in GK’s field practice area is well accepted and the growth rate is 1.5%, while the national rate is above 2%.

GK had introduced a Rural Health Insurance System in 1973 in GK operated Primary Health Care Centres and hospitals. Poor and low income groups are charged lower rates of Health Insurance Premium while rich and middle class pay much higher rates. But all groups receive equal quality health care.

Gonoshasthaya Kendra was the first to introduce the concept of paramedics in Bangladesh, innovation was later on adopted by the Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh in 1977. GK introduced another innovation of mini-laparotomy method of female sterilisation (tubectomy) in Bangladesh in 1974. Female paramedics were also trained to perform mini-laparotomy tubectomy.

In addition, Gonoshasthaya Kendra has a research programme under which medicinal plants and vaccine research units have been set up. Latest project is the Gono Biswabidyalay (People's University) which has been set up under Private Universities Act, 1992, to offer courses in Development Studies, Local Governance, Social Sciences, and Health Sciences.

Gonoshasthaya Kendra persuaded Prof. M. Yunus of Grameen Bank to establish Gonoshasthaya-Grameen Textile Mills Limited to provide backup service in dyeing, printing finishing of handwoven cloths produced by thousands of handloom weavers in Sirajganj, Pabna and other areas of Bangladesh to improve quality of their work and thereby enhance their income and also to protect household environment from hazardous dyes. In this venture, GK Trust has 67% ownership while Grameen has 33% equity.