

"Ayurvedya" - Gathering special 1974.
- Scientific Essay Competition - First Prize.

FIRST PRIZE

Role Of Women In Smallpox Eradication

Shrikant Y. Wagh, III B. A. M. & S.

Small pox Eradication - one of the greatest health problems in India - is being discussed every now and then. This essay, although its subject seems to be of a little significance, shows how much Mr. Wagh can work on the given subject.

-Student Editor.

Introduction

Smallpox-one of the great killers of man-is an acute exanthematous fever caused by specific virus, characterised by a sudden onset of fever, head-ache, back-ache etc. followed by a typical centrifugal rash on the 3rd or 4th day. Although preventable, smallpox continues to be a constant threat all over the world, especially in India. Many patients of smallpox die, and of those who survive-some are disfigured for life and others become blind. Almost half the reported cases in the world are from India, and here for each such case, there are 2 to 10 unreported cases. During 1969, the incidence of smallpox in India was about 3.6 per 1,00,000 population.

Specificity Of Role Of Women

As I think it to be, the role of women in Smallpox Eradication has got a very little specificity. Men can play almost the same role as the women can. Especially in educated families, both father and mother are attentive towards the health of their children. Amongst the non-educated population both father and mother do not under-

stand the importance of health.

Of course, the nurses working in the rural areas who can reach very near to the mind of the community, can certainly play some role, if they are willing to do so and if they know something about health education.

The Mother

(I) Patriarchal family system is found everywhere in India. The father is so busy with his affairs. that he cannot look after certain minor affairs. The busy father cannot pay attention towards the maintenance of the health of his children. The mother, dealing with the household work gets a lot of time which she can spend for the health-maintenance of her children.

(II) The children upto the age of ten years, are more or less fully dependant on their mother. Whenever they are in difficulty they go to their mother first. The father gets second preference in this connection.

(III) A woman has her relations, with her own children particularly close with the latest baby, less intimate with the ex-

baby and older children. The mother-child relation-ship is obviously more intimate than the father-child relationship.

Because of the above three factors, the mother can certainly play a better role in the maintenance of the health of her children. The habits of an individual are formed more or less in the childhood. In the days of childhood, the mother has got full influence on child's behaviour. Let us now see what role the mother can play in relation with the subject.

(1) Smallpox vaccination is of utmost importance. Leaving the superstitions aside, she should pay attention towards the primary vaccination and revaccinations of her children.

(2) In the early childhood, the child behaves as its mother tells it. The mother should give a clean handkerchief to each of her children and tell him to use it during coughing, sneezing etc. Once the child gets habituated, it would not leave the habit throughout the life.

(3) Whenever her child gets an attack of smallpox, she should immediately isolate the child from other children by removing it to Infectious Disease Hospital, or if impossible, to a cottage in her farm.

(4) She herself should get vaccinated, if she has to look after her small-pox-affected child. She should then see that all the belongings of her child are destroyed in the proper way.

(5) It is customary to visit a closely related person when he or she becomes ill. In a case of smallpox, this practice which is more or less a formality, should be strictly avoided. When the woman would come

to know the evils of such formalities, they would rarely observe them.

(6) Women generally show more interest than men in the surroundings and happenings nearby which helps them to increase their knowledge about the community in which they live. Hence they can easily find out the patients of smallpox if any. A case of smallpox should be immediately reported to the health authority. A woman should see particularly whether any of her children was in contact with the small pox patient during the incubation period (i. e. 14 days before the onset of the disease)

(7) Whenever there is a case of smallpox in the community, a woman should see that she herself and her children are vaccinated immediately.

It is not that the woman can influence her children only. She can also influence her husband, other members of family and friends. Every woman should see that her related members, of the community are vaccinated and revaccinated, because in this connection, vaccination has got prime importance.

Some women look after the house-animals like cows, buffaloes etc. Such women should see that the milk of an animal infected with smallpox is strictly avoided. The woman, looking after cooking should see that the milk bought from outside is disinfected properly.

Health Education To The Mothers

As already stated, superstitious and religious ideas are more amongst in women. The teachers in health welfare should see that the women are properly

- educated. The importance of vaccination should be strenuously stressed upon them. Any new idea, howsoever valuable it may be, is not accepted easily, Hence constant hammering of the importance of vaccination is essential.

Certain misunderstandings which the people, especially women have in their minds, are as follows :

1. When small pox vaccination is carried out ' The Gramdeveta ' (Village Goddess) or ' Shitaladevi ' or ' Mata ' becomes furious destroying the whole of the family. This seems to be the greatest hindrance in smallpox eradication.

2. It is believed that after smallpox vaccination, one coconut, a piece of cloth and some grain is required to be dedicated to the Goddess.

3. Some people apply ' Bukka ' or ash to the lesion of primary vaccination.

4. Some do not allow the scabs to be destroyed.

5. After vaccination the child becomes ill (fever, mild rash etc.) Hence better not to vaccinate.

6. Some people do not like their children vaccinated or injected.

In India and many other countries, smallpox vaccination has been made compulsory. Mere compulsion is not sufficient. When the people know the importance of vaccination, there would not be any need for compulsion. This understanding rarely comes to people suddenly. It is a process which builds up slowly, step by step, as they learn more about it. To bring about this understanding and acceptance about

smallpox vaccination, nonstop and long term programmes should be undertaken.

Teaching should as far as possible be accompanied with auditory and visual aids. Exhibitions, films and filmstrips, posters and wallcharts and many other such devices are very useful. Constant hammering of the idea can be brought about by them. These aids should be attractive, less expensive and to the point.

There should be adequate organization of the health services and the health educators should do their best to root out these hampering ideas. This will surely lead us to our goal in smallpox eradication.

The Nurses And Midwives

The nurse-patient relationship is often so intimate that they can easily give some advice. Women can tell their difficulties more frankly to the nurses than to the male doctors. The nurses working in the hospitals and especially in the rural areas can surely help the smallpox eradication programme. Because of inadequate health educators and other problems in India, the nurses should themselves do the job of Health Education. For this purpose they should be taught very well about Health Education. One more important thing is that they should have urge to teach people. Without an incentive towards teaching, the health education will be altogether useless.

The nurses who want to be good health education workers should fulfil the following qualifications.

1. Qualities of teachers-clear speech,

pleasant manners, sense of humour.

2. Thorough knowledge of customs and habits of the people to whom they are going to teach.

3. Good personal relations.

4. Must learn how much knowledge and change the people are able to or willing to accept.

5. Should have aptitude to learn themselves.

If health education becomes an official work for the nurses and doctors, within no time a lot of progress towards the goal will be seen.

Reporting a case of smallpox, isolating it, vaccinating the other people in the locality and observing 14 days contacts of the patient-these are the essentials which the nurses should look after. For the doctors early and correct diagnosis is the job of utmost importance in a case of small pox.

Epilogue

Role of women in smallpox eradication has got a very little specificity, I repeat. This does not mean that their role is of no importance. Men and women play the same role in the maintenance of public health.

Every individual, whether a male or a female, should understand the importance of good health and should try his or her best to maintain good health. I do not know when that day will come but it should not be very far away.

