

## **Dr. Zafrullah Chowdhury: A Biographical Sketch of a Health Activist**

Served as Projects' Coordinator of Gonoshasthaya Kendra (GK) a Public Charitable Trust (Foundation) from 1972 until 1 May 2009. Since then, working as Public Health General Practitioner and continuing as one of the Trustees of GK Trust.

### **Academic Qualifications and Training :**

**M.B.B.S.** with distinction in Surgery, Dhaka Medical College, University of Dhaka, 1964.

**Primary FRCS**, Royal College of Surgeons, UK. 1970

**Honorary FCGP**, College of General Practitioners, Bangladesh, 1990

**Doctor of Humanitarian Service** (DHS) from World Organization of Natural Medicine Toronto, Canada, May, 2009.

Trained as general and vascular surgeon in United Kingdom from 1965-1971. He passed Primary FRCS examination of Royal College of Surgeons in 1970, but did not sit for final F.R.C.S. examination, to join Bangladesh war of liberation against Pakistan. Initially as a guerilla fighter, later on, he along with another orthopedic and Accident surgeon from England, Dr. M.A. Mobin set up **Bangladesh Field Hospital**, the first field hospital for freedom fighters and the refugees, located in the border between Tripura State of India and the then East Pakistan (Bangladesh). This was a make-shift 480-bed hospital run by 5 Bangladeshi doctors and large number of women volunteers who had no previous medical training.

### **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 which 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 Organization was framed.

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

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

Gonoshasthaya Kendra has for the last 40 years worked on community health services. It has had successfully introduced innovative community health care services in Bangladesh especially in the field of paramedical training and domiciliary services achieving low maternal mortality rates (MMR) and infant mortality rates (IMR). In most GK's operational areas, MMR and IMR is between 1/3 to 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 2.2%.

GK had introduced a **Rural Health Insurance System** in 1973 for providing health care 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, an innovation which was later adopted by the Government of Bangladesh in 1977. GK

introduced mini-laparotomy method of female sterilisation (tubectomy) in Bangladesh in 1974.

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

### **Publications/Articles:**

**Tubectomy by Paraprofessional Surgeons in rural Bangladesh:** was co-authored by Zafrullah Chowdhury, on the experience of mini-laparotomy by female paramedics was published in the Lancet, 27<sup>th</sup> September, 1975. The Lancet is the oldest and leading medical journal in the world, published simultaneously from UK and USA. This was the first lead article from the Indian sub-continent ever published in the Lancet. A number of other articles by Zafrullah Chowdhury have been published in national and international journals.

Another article “**Research: A Method of Colonization**” published in 1977 was translated into Bengali, French, German, Italian, Dutch, Spanish and many Indian languages.

An article by Zafrullah Chowdhury is included in Jelliffe’s “Textbook of Paediatrics for Tropics and Sub-tropics” published in UK by J. Arnold, 1991.

**His book “The Politics of Essential Drugs: The Making of a Successful Health Strategy: Lessons from Bangladesh”** has been published by Zed Books Ltd. of London, UK, in 1995. Indian edition of the book was published by Sage Publishers, New Delhi in 1996. Bangladesh edition was published by University Publishers Ltd (UPL) in 1997.

**He co-authored another book “Achieving the Millennium Development Goal on Maternal Mortality: Gonoshasthaya Kendra’s Experience in Rural Bangladesh”**, Published in 2007, by Gono Prokoshani.

Co- authored with S.L. Bachman “**The People’s Health Centers: Building Primary Health Care in Bangladesh**” published in "The Practice of International Health: A Case-Based Orientation" by Daniel Perlman and Ananya Roy, Published by Oxford University Press, Oxford & New York, 2009.

Dr Chowdhury has translated a number of WHO publications from English to Bangla (Language spoken by over 350 million people) and he is Chairperson of Board of Editors- Mashik Gonoshasthaya (Monthly People’s Health) in Bangla which has over 200,000 readerships.

### **Contributions outside Gonoshasthaya Kendra**

**Founder** - Member & Chair of the Founding Meeting of Freedom Fighters to established Muktiyoddah Sangshad in 1972.

**Chairman** - Muktiyoddah Sangshad (Freedom Fighters National Council), 1978-1980.

**Member** - National Education Committee, which prepared the Interim Education Policy in 1979, Government of Bangladesh.

**Member** - Commission for Development of Women set up by late President Ziaur Rahman in 1980, Recommendations of Commission have initiated proactive measures and policies in support of women’s development.

**Member** - Expert Committee which formulated the Bangladesh National Drug Policy in 1982. Implementation of recommendations of this committee enhanced local production of pharmaceuticals and improvement in quality of drugs, elimination of harmful and non-essential drugs and regulation of prices and imports.

**Senior Fellow**- Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, Dhaka from 1975-81

**Member** - Projects' Coordination Committee, International Centre for Diarrhoeal Diseases Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B), Dhaka (till 2000).

**Member** - Executive Board of Bangladesh Fertility Research Programme, 1986-90. Government of Bangladesh.

**Member** - Drug Control Committee, 1986-90, Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh.

**Member** - Drug Pricing Committee, 1986-90, Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh.

**Member** - Health Care Improvement Committee, 1987-90, Government of Bangladesh.

**Member** - National Population Committee, 1989-90, Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh.

**Member** - Executive Board of Grameen Bank, 1989-91.

**Chairman-** Executive Committee and Founder Member of Bangladesh Association for Community Education (BACE), 1989-90.

**Chairman-** Executive Committee of Association for Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB), 1989-90. was dismissed from ADAB in 1991 for refusing to participate in partisan national politics. NGO's should not be involved in national party politics.

**Member** - National Education Advisory Committee, 1990, Government of Bangladesh.

**Member** - Academic Council of Jahangir Nagar University, 1984-91.

**Member** - Dhaka University Syndicate 1990-92.

**Founder** - Member (on behalf of GK)- People's Health Assembly held in 2000  
Gonoshasthaya Kendra

**Member** - Executive Committee, Centre for Mass Education in Science (CMES), Bangladesh till 2007.

**Member-** National Council of Freedom Fighters, Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh

**Member** - Global External Advisory Panel of World Bank in the field of Health, Nutrition and Population (HNP), 1997-2000.

**Member** - Global Development Network, New Delhi, India till 2010.

### **To Date: In Bangladesh**

**Trustee** - Gonoshasthaya Kendra Public Charitable Trust, Dhaka.

**Trustee** - Gono Bishwabidyalay (People's University), Savar, Dhaka.

**Chairman-** Gonoshasthaya Antibiotics Ltd.

**Chairman** - Gonomudran Ltd. (Printing and Publishing Company). 100% share of all Gonoshasthaya Companies owned by Gonoshasthaya Charitable trust.

**Member** - Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) since 1971-1991 (Also member of East Pakistan Medical Association from 1964 till 1971) BMA membership was cancelled arbitrarily in a public meeting in 1991 for formulating pro-people 'National Health Policy-1990' which was discussed in Parliament and approved but not enacted. According to BMA board, the policy was anti people and against the interest of professionals.

**Chairman** - Gonoshasthaya Grameen Textile Mills Ltd., a joint venture programme of Gonoshasthaya Kendra and Grameen Bank for the development of handloom weavers of Bangladesh

**Life Member-** Bangladesh Private Medical Practitioners Association (BPMPA), Dhaka.

**Member** - National Committee for Primary Education, Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh

**Advisor** - Federation of NGOs in Bangladesh (FNB)

**Member** - National Committee for Prevention of Addiction Government of Peoples Republic of Bangladesh.

**Senior Fellow-** Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), Dhaka

### **To Date : Outside Bangladesh**

**Founder Member-** South-South Solidarity, New Delhi, India.

**Member** - Executive Committee, Innovations et Reseaux Pour le Development (IRED), Development Innovations and Network, Geneva, Switzerland.

**Member** - MALAM (Medical Lobby for Appropriate Marketing), Australia.

**Member - British Medical Association, London, UK.**

**Founder member** - Health Action International (HAI), Member, Executive Board, HAI-Asia Pacific.

**Member** - Advisory Board, IDEA Health (International Dialogue on Evidence- Informed Action for Health), WHO

**Member** - Governing Council of Peoples' Health Movement (PHM)

**Member** - UN Task Force on Non Communicable Diseases(NCD)

### **Other Activities:**

Acted as Resource person to various international bodies on health care, medical education, pharmaceuticals and women's development. These include WHO, UNICEF and FAO.

Acted on number of occasions as Temporary Advisor of WHO for essential drugs Non Communicable Diseases(NCD) and educational materials for health personnel.

Advised Government of India, Somalia, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka and Malaysia on Rational Drug Policy.

Dr. Zafrullah Chowdhury had contributed as **Resource Person and keynote speaker** at numerous seminars held in Angola, Australia, Belgium, Bhutan, Canada, Chili, China, Cuba, Denmark, Egypt, Ecuador, Finland, France, Germany, Haiti, India, Iran, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Japan, Kenya, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Mauritius, Nepal, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Norway, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, Philippines, Portugal, Russia, Sri Lanka, Senegal, Somalia, Spain, South Africa, South Korea, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Tanzania Taiwan (ROC), Tunisia, Thailand, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States of America and Vietnam. Zafrullah Chowdhury had also visited former USSR , Argentina, Falk Islands; and many other countries.

Dr. Chowdhury played important role on behalf of GK in establishing the Pharmacy department in Jahangir Nagar University (a public University). GK made substantial donation for the said purpose.

### **AWARDS:**

**Certificate of Commendation** in 1972 for contribution to the freedom struggle for the liberation of Bangladesh.

Awarded the **Swedish Youth Peace Prize** in 1974 in recognition of his contribution in setting up Gonoshasthaya Kendra, a primary health care programme for the rural people utilizing rural women and men in delivering health care.

Highest National Award of Bangladesh the **Independence Day Award** 1977 was presented to Dr. Zafrullah Chowdhury in 1978 in recognition of his contribution to the development of primary health care in Bangladesh and the delivery of family planning services at the grass roots level.

Awarded the **Ramon Magsaysay Award**, popularly known as the '**Asian Nobel Prize**' in 1985, in recognition of his contribution to community development and his role in the introduction of a National Drug Policy in Bangladesh.

Under his leadership in 1992 Gonoshasthaya Kendra was given the **Right Livelihood Award**, popularly known as the '**Alternative Nobel Prize**', in recognition of its contribution to Primary Health Care development in Bangladesh and its role in the introduction of a Rational Drug Policy in Bangladesh.

University of California; Berkeley honoured Dr. Zafrullah Chowdhury with International '**Heroes of Public Health**' Award in March, 2002.

World Organization of Natural Medicine, Toronto, Canada awarded '**Doctor of Humanitarian Service (DHS)**' in May 2009

Numerous National and Local Awards were awarded in recognition of his role as a freedom fighter, community worker, Social activist and innovator in the field of health care, education, women's development and disaster management.

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