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Young medics offer succour to flood-hit Bihar

Jaya Shroff Bhalla & Neha Bhayana
New Delhi/Mumbai, January 6

dice and typhoid," said Dr Kumar Harsh, a cancer specialist, who spent a week in Bihar's Sapaul district.

ON BEING denied permission to work in flood-ravaged Bihar last year, 18 young doctors from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences took unpaid leave and joined many other volunteers, ensuring that the state survived the flood of diseases that followed the calamity.

With no funds from the government or sponsors, the doctors — between 25 and 30 years — used their own money to travel and work in Bihar.

Many of them ventured to flood-ravaged parts where locals and senior doctors refused to go. "We were needed there. As a doctor, I knew of the dangers that lurk in flood waters, from cholera to jaun-

Someone, he felt, had to set an example, and his sentiment found echo among young doctors across the country.

Maharashtra alone accounted for 70 doctors, including nine from Mumbai's KEM Hospital.

Dr Ravikant Singh, a second-year preventive and social medicine student at KEM, spent four months in the districts of Saharsa, Supaul and Madhepura — the worst hit by the floods that killed 530 people and displaced 33.56 lakh people. "I was scared of losing the year as we were officially allowed to go only for 15 days, but I stayed on. How could a doctor turn away?" said Singh.

His classmate Dr Char-

AGENT OF CHANGE

VOLUNTEER DOCTORS

They took unpaid leave, spent their own money to travel and work in Bihar

drakant Patil died after being struck by lightning in Supaul, but he and the other doctors did not rush back to safety.

"I am glad help reached the flood-hit areas in time. If we had relied completely on the state government, we probably would have had not one but many epidemics," said Dr Harsh.

With absolutely no help from the state or central government, these doctors set up health clinics in districts with non-existing health infrastructure.

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(Extreme left) Ravikant Singh, a medical student at KEM Hospital, spent four months in Bihar. (Above) KEM doctors camping in Khadi Gram Udyog in Saharsa district. (Left) Cancer specialist Dr Kumar Harsh, who spent a week in Sapaul district.

PHOTOS: SANJEEV VERMA

