

Young docs take good health to Mankhurd slum

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RIGHT DOSE: The medical camps, held every Sunday, have helped rid the neighbourhood of quacks

Chinmayi Shalya | TNN

Mumbai: A run-down tinshed classroom in a sprawling slum at Mankhurd hardly attracts any students. But every Sunday, this dimly-lit room morphs into a bustling medical centre where hundreds of residents queue up.

Lodged among the shanties of the Mandala slum, this bal-waadi is where young doctors from KEM Hospital camp to reach out to almost 1.5 lakh residents. Trainee doctors, Indian as well as from foreign universities, have been coming to Mandala for a free medical camps for the past two months. Their presence has helped rid the neighbourhood of quacks.

"It is a relief to have skilled doctors for treatment," said Phool Chand Yadav, a labourer whose four-year-old daughter has been suffering from asthma for the past two years.

The closest hospital is either Sion or JJ in Byculla where the slum-dwellers go only during an emergency. Many, like Yadav, tired of spending in vain on neighbourhood doctors, now hope things will improve.

Zarina Bano, mother of four, had not been to a doctor for a year despite a swelling in her abdomen. She preferred to live with it than consult a quack in her neighbourhood. But on Sunday,

she also brought her three-year-old son along for a check-up.

"There is no government hospital in the vicinity. Nor are there proper and subsidised clinics where people can go for treatment," said Dr Ravikant Singh, chief coordinator of Doctors For You, an NGO working to provide access to healthcare, and an MD student at KEM Hospital. Singh launched the initiative after activist Medha Patkar pointed out the poor health conditions.

Located near the Deonar dumping ground, this slum has scores of people suffering from malaria, skin diseases/infections and tuberculosis; even the immunisation coverage is poor. More than half of the children are delivered at home in unhygienic conditions. "This is why we give priority to women and children," said Singh.

For the three trainees from the US, who accompanied him this Sunday, the experience of observing and treating patients at Mandala was in stark contrast to what was practised back home.

"In the US, chronic diseases like hypertension, heart ailments, cancer and asthma are most common. Here, infectious diseases are more prevalent," said Monique Tanna (25) from New York. Elizabeth Patton (31) found the number of patients frequenting small clinics as the most revealing experience.