



Photos courtesy: Saraswathi Moorthy

ACTION RESEARCH

# Staying healthy – in school and in life

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The project, undertaken by the Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education (HBCSE), Mumbai and Ramniranjan Jhunjhunwala college of Arts, Science and Commerce (RJC), Ghatkopar, originated from an observation made regarding the ill health and poor fitness levels of students. On probing, it was found that most students do not pay attention to their diet and nutritional intake. Some students eat junk food which has very little nutritive value. The situation was very disturbing to teachers as health has a direct impact on the students' concentration in class and performance in exams. Health is a broad concept and given the constraints of time, it was decided to concentrate on areas that directly and indirectly impact the quality of student life.

## Goals of the study

The study attempted to build awareness regarding students' mental and physical health and educate them about the emerging prevalence of lifestyle diseases. The study hopes to create a healthier student population by raising their awareness about wellbeing and showing how good health can be maintained. It is an attempt to reach out to the future generation and work towards a healthier society.

The health project is action based project and several activities were undertaken during the project. The

project was for the students and of the students and it was intended to have activity-based learning outcomes. It was carried out with the students as the focal point where their engagement was necessary to help in the smooth conduct of activities. In order to spread the message of maintaining good health, six boys and six girls were identified as health ambassadors, *sehat sakhas* and *sehat sakhis*. Each *sehat sakha/sakhi* was briefed about their duties and role in the project. Activities were conducted in the RJC and HBCSE campuses. The various activities that were conducted were:

## At RJC campus

At RJC, the activities under the health project were inaugurated by Dr Rajendra Agarkar, Head Medical unit, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research. Dr Agarkar delivered his keynote address and stressed on the importance of creating awareness on various aspects of health. This was followed by PowerPoint presentations and street play competitions. The students participated in both and the events were judged by invited guests. Students who won in the competitions were given cash prizes. The main objective of



conducting these events was to make the students aware of the importance of good health and the consequences of neglecting one's health.

PowerPoint presentations were made on the following topics

- Tuberculosis
- Pranik healing
- Pollution and its impact on health
- Destressing life
- Cancer
- Swaccha Bharat
- Malnutrition
- Balanced diet

Street plays were presented on the following topics

- Alcoholism
- Tobacco abuse
- Cancer awareness
- Stress
- Clean India – healthy India
- Dengue
- Drug and tobacco addiction
- Effects of health issues on day to day life

#### At HBCSE

Under the health programme, a one day visit was organized to HBCSE, TIFR. Sixty five students along with the project co-coordinators visited HBCSE. Dr. Sugra Chunawala briefed the students about the day's activities. Ms Karuna Neherkar, Nurse, TIFR made a PowerPoint presentation and briefed students about a balanced and healthy diet with emphasis on the importance of fibre intake in prevention of diabetes mellitus.

A PowerPoint presentation highlighting the aspects of temperature of food was presented by Ms. Neelam Surve, Technical Officer, Pathology, TIFR. It is necessary to know about food borne diseases and how micro-organisms duplicate themselves and why it is important to eat freshly cooked food.

Prof Archana Shukla introduced stress and the importance of counselling to students. The session on coping with stress was interactive.

The post lunch session by Dr Shilpa Ghare began with a PowerPoint presentation on diabetes and its preventions. The students had an activity session measuring their height, weight and waist circumference for calculating their BMI Index and filling up the diabetes risk score card.

A demo was arranged to help students understand the diastolic and systolic readings of blood pressure.

The last session was conducted by Ms Reena Madian and she guided the students on diluting stress. She highlighted the importance of meditation and concluded the session with a five minute meditation for all.

#### At RJC campus – Sehat Diwas

In order to highlight the importance of good health and spread this message amongst students, it was decided to celebrate Sehat Diwas. On 14<sup>th</sup> February, 2015, Sehat Diwas was celebrated in RJC.

Sehat sakha and sehat sakhis were felicitated for their active involvement in the project. Students prepared posters on various health related topics which were displayed, evaluated, and judged. Cash prizes were awarded to the best three messages.

The above sessions were followed by games and a practical hand wash demo with hand sanitizer. Feedback from the students was sought to find out the effectiveness of such programmes on the target group.

All the activities organized under the health project were well received by the students as indicated in the feedback forms. The activities were ranked 7 on a scale of 1 to 10 in terms of effectiveness of the programme which indicates that students significantly benefitted by participating in the health programme. A post activity questionnaire was administered to the student participants to test their awareness levels after the programme. Thus, a health programme that focused on select health parameters was able to raise awareness amongst students and make them feel responsible for their own health and wellbeing.

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