

# Service providing in-home care for the Elderly



Deep Probeen Porisheba (DPP) is a unique and first of its kind concept of providing in-home services for the elderly in Kolkata and its outskirts. This service has been brought to Kolkata by HRDS Inc., USA. It is an education consultancy that operates three medical schools in the Caribbean, Saint James School of Medicine, in Anguilla, Bonaire and St. Vincent. DPP recently organized an interactive session on a burning social issue, "Care for the Elderly – Charity or Necessity". The session highlighted one of the growing problems in India today: the care of the elderly or the lack thereof. The speakers shared positive views on the way Indians take care of their elderly as part of their culture, and how inspiring it is for the people in the West, but also how this is seeing a gradual breakdown in modern day Indian society. A bit of insight was also given on the systems of elderly care that exist in the US and other countries around the world, where various government and private agencies deliver these types of services for the elderly in the absence of family support, while the UK has long incorporated geriatric care services within their healthcare system. It was concluded that it was time for Indians to accept the fact that this is a growing issue and that workable solutions were needed that also suit the current situation of the young working generation. BE's Abhijit Ganguly spoke to Shirsha Guha, Director of DPP, and COO of Saint James School of Medicine

## Is there a trend towards care for our elderly on charity alone?

There is a problem of loneliness among the elderly that in our demanding lives we continually fail to confront as a society either due to guilt or the lack of prioritization. This is just one of the problems faced by the elderly today. Many have debilitating health problems that limit their movement and ability to go about their daily lives. Some of them are isolated in their homes for this reason, both physically and mentally. To tackle the challenge of an ageing society, there must be an equitable solution that works both for the senior citizen and the younger generation, otherwise it will fail before it even gets started. Also the services must be regular and consistent in order to make a difference. Ideally, as in the West, this issue should be addressed at a government level due to the

high number of elderly people who need care. But this requires a strong infrastructure and sweeping policy changes that are likely to take time and funding. In the meantime, private organizations like Deep Probeen Porisheba (DPP) are required to fill that gap. Although NGOs and charitable organizations do an admirable job, they are limited in their ability to deliver consistent services because of their dependence on outside funding and volunteers. In the arena of care for the elderly, consistency and predictability are needed in order to build trust and confidence in the elderly person being cared for. DPP was created to address just this issue, which is a necessity and can by no means be left to charity. The solutions we offer help both the senior citizens to regain their lives and freedom of movement, as well as their children who either live far away, or are busy earning a living, but still want to make sure that their elderly parents or loved ones are taken care of. We take pride in offering these services in a professional, consistent and reliable manner that is comparable to any service that you will find overseas.

## How do you view the geriatric care in the West and how does India fare comparatively?

According to the Global Age Watch Index 2014, which ranks countries based on several categories, Norway and Sweden rank #1 and #2 respectively among 96 countries while India ranks a dismal #69 with Afghanistan finishing at #96. From personal experience having lived and worked in several countries including Denmark, the Caribbean and the United States, the culture of joint families in India was the saving grace for the elderly. However, with time that system has broken down gradually and more and more families have gone nuclear or have migrated away from the aging family members. Sometimes, it is not possible to take the elderly parents with them as they migrate, leaving the elderly parents and relatives in India alone, helpless and sometimes isolated. Even now, old age homes are still not a common feature in most of India mainly due to the cultural mindset where it is still a last resort when all other attempts to take care of them fails. Also, there is a serious lack of accountability and oversight in these institutions, which make them a poor alternative. That is why the model of in-home services is the most attractive option in India today, where elderly persons can continue to live in familiar surroundings. Unfortunately, so far, in-home services have been focused on medical services like doctors, nurses and allied medical care. The basic problems of loneliness and isolation have not been addressed. That is what Deep Probeen Porisheba brings to the arena: non-medical services aimed at helping senior citizens regain their lives and freedom of movement, bringing them out of their isolation and back into society, almost reversing the clock. As a business model, this is not an easy proposition, which is why most organizations have steered clear of it. It requires a sound financial foundation, with an effective logistical and service delivery system with experienced and capable individuals at every level. This is what Deep Probeen Porisheba offers a service that is different. ■ BE Bureau