ABSTRACT 125

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Promoting and advocating age-friendly healthcare in the Thar Desert, India

The second most populous country in the world, India, is home to second largest population of older people. India is a country of villages as 70% of its population live in villages, which are underserved, less developed and are home to large number of older people. Impacted by chronic droughts and severe food, water shortages, Thar is one of the least developed regions. Older people live in most difficult conditions in Thar. They are impoverished, malnourished and isolated.

GRAVIS, an NGO based in Thar, has been focusing strongly on older people's health. To identify the challenges, in 2000, a survey covering over 5,000 older people was organized, aiming on gathering information on older people's health needs. In the year 2000, GRAVIS has set up a fully-equipped hospital in a remote village with special facilities for older people. The hospital facilities and the staff strictly adhere to age-friendly healthcare guidelines of WHO. The hospital staff goes through age-friendly healthcare trainings at least once in a year.

In 2003, GRAVIS launched eye-care program for older people . Till date, over 16,000 older people have been treated by GRAVIS eye care unit. A network of Village Health Workers (VHWs) has been developed. Currently, 521 VHWs are active serving over 700,000 people. They get specialized trainings on geriatric health through a training curriculum. GRAVIS has been advocating older people's health at local, national, regional and global levels. GRAVIS played important part in identifying the special needs of older people in post-disaster situations.

GRAVIS intervention have so far benefited over 45,000 older people living in the region. In future, GRAVIS wishes to expand this programme further in rural parts of India with strong focus on service delivery and capacity building.

Key words - ageing, health, community.