



DEVisING INTEGRATED SOLUTIONS...



It was a warm summer evening of 2015, Dr Arsalan was sitting with his family to break his fast during Ramadan when he heard the news on the television: “A blast has been heard in Patel Parra in Jamshed Town, further details are unknown at this point in time.” Fear gripping his heart, Dr Arsalan called the Lady Health Worker on his team who was working in the area. “Yes, it is true, we heard the blast, and can see black smoke in the air. It looks like our outreach site. But thankfully we are all fine!”

Jamshed Town was a conflict zone in Karachi and bomb blasts, local skirmishes, target killings, and crimes against health workers was common. Three years later, Dr Arsalan was entrusted with the duty to improve the immunization coverage of Jamshed Town under the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) in Pakistan. Managing the entire area was a challenging task, and Dr Arsalan was the best choice. A high achiever during his academic career and the pride of his parents, he chose to serve his country in challenging times.

“When I was assigned the task of being an EPI focal person for Jamshed Town, I was a bit skeptical. I knew what the position entailed – a scared team, a distrusting community, and a vast and challenging

area to cover,” claims Dr. Arsalan. “I had to devise a strategy that could connect all the dots simultaneously and achieve the coverage we needed.”

“First and foremost, to manage the size of the area, I recommended its division into 13 parts, with a doctor assigned as the supervisor of each part. These doctors, along with their teams, would form the EPI Working Group of Jamshed Town. It was a difficult task because it required assigning 13 on-duty doctors only for Immunization in Jamshed Town.” A smile of accomplishment spread across his face as Dr. Arslan reminisced the formation of the Jamshed Town EPI Working Group, “My seniors however trusted me and the idea was approved, and I was made the focal point and leader of the group.”

“Next we had to build trust and eradicate fear from the team and the community. For this purpose, the internal communication between the team had to be fool-proof. Therefore, I created a WhatsApp Group for real-time updates and monitoring team’s activities.” According to the Working Group’s microplan, every doctor had to visit his/her respective area once a week on routine basis and during medical campaigns to interact with the community. To initiate the practice, Dr Arsalan visited the blast sites and other security compromised areas in the community to encourage his team members and relay a message of solidarity to the community. As a result, the teams began visiting their respective assigned sites without fear and the community became increasingly receptive.

“The consistent effort and presence of my team members within the community led to a bond being developed between the workers and the community members,” exclaimed Dr Arslan, “when the community people witness that a doctor in a white lab coat is sitting at a camp all day, every week, despite security concerns, they are encouraged to visit the camp and listen to what the professional has to say – after all it is for their own benefit.”



He continued, “our strategy of connecting with the community worked! And people started showing up at our medical camps. Just in a matter of one month, the turnout increased from 50 to 200! Which was not just a huge achievement but also a major motivating factor for the team members.” Moreover, with every team sending in updates of their progress, a drive to thrive was induced in the team. The WhatsApp Group also allowed leaders to interact with each other, share experiences and challenges, and learn from best practices of their counterparts.

Dr Arsalan’s innovative idea of analyzing the area’s problems and dividing them into smaller fragments led to the development of focused strategies. These smaller solutions ultimately resulted in a complete solution that resolved the immunization problem of Jamshed Town, and made Dr. Arsalan a vaccine hero for the community.