

EDITORIAL

National Social Service Scheme: Integration in Medical EducationBhola Nath¹, Ranjeeta Kumari², Namita Kamboj³¹Associate Professor, ³MBBS Student, VCSGGMS&RI, Srinagar, Pauri Garhwal, Uttarakhand; ²Assistant Professor, Department of Community & Family Medicine, AIIMS, Rishikesh**Corresponding Author**

Address for Correspondence: Bhola Nath, Associate Professor, Department of Community Medicine, VCSGGMS&RI, Srinagar, Pauri Garhwal, Uttarakhand
E Mail ID: bhola_2001@sify.com

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“I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I woke up and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy.”

- *Rabindranath Tagore*

National Service Scheme popularly known as “NSS” was launched on Mahatma Gandhi’s birth centenary year, 1969 under Ministry of Youth affairs and Sports, in 37 universities, involving students, with the primary aim to establish meaningful linkage between the campus and the community. The scheme now extends to all the states and universities in the country and covers +2 level also in many states. Most government and government-aided institutions have volunteer NSS units, and private institutions are encouraged to have NSS volunteers. Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, had recognized that the country could not progress in a desired direction until the student youth were motivated to work for the upliftment of the community. Therefore, for the national reconstruction and national resurgence, it was deemed fit that the students and teachers should be properly sensitised and utilised for strengthening the Indian society as a whole, with particular emphasis on rural community. The motto of NSS, “NOT ME, BUT YOU” states the need for a democratic living and a selfless service. NSS aims at improving the student’s personality through community service.

The youth of any country are a vital resource of the nation, beaming with energy, which is symbolised in the red colour of the eight spokes of the wheels in the NSS symbol; however, energy without a proper direction has often proved disastrous; and therefore, NSS envisages the amalgamation of energy & enthusiasm of the student youth with a guided direction for the betterment of both the students as well as the community. In doing so, while the community gains from the services of the volunteers; the volunteers also learn a lot from the community and the process. They are

exposed to people from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds and develop an insight into the problems of people. NSS activities have aroused among the student youth, an awareness of the realities of life, a better understanding and appreciation of the problems of the people. In the process of camping at the adopted village, which is an essential part of the NSS activities, they also learn to live with minimum resources, do team work, share responsibilities, become self-dependent as well as shed off inhibitions, which enhances their personality development, apart from gaining community mobilisation skills, leadership qualities and development of social & civic responsibility. The main objective of NSS programme is to prepare the NSS volunteers for the democratic, self-disciplined and self-reliant way of life.

NSS is mainly “out of the classroom” student eccentric program where teachers provide only guidance while students are the main actors. It inculcates in students a sense of leadership and teamwork enabling them to identify and resolve community issues. Hence leadership, collectivism, social responsibility and community participation are at work all the time. These attributes also make them come close to social and environmental realities.

There have been several instances of excellent work and exemplary conduct of NSS units which have earned them respect and confidence of the people throughout the country. The special camping programmes organised under the themes of ‘Youth Against Famine (1973)’, ‘Youth Against Dirt & Disease (1974-75)’, ‘Youth for Eco-Development’, ‘Youth for Rural Reconstruction’, ‘Youth for National Development and Youth for Literacy (1985-93)’, ‘Youth for National Integration and Communal Harmony (1993-95)’ etc. have resulted in gains both to the society & the volunteers. Also, from 1991-92 onwards NSS has launched a nationwide campaign on AIDS awareness called “Universities Talk AIDS” (UTA)

which has earned international attention and appreciation.

Community service rendered by the NSS volunteers has been quite wide-ranging, like adoption of villages for intensive development work, carrying out the medico-social surveys, setting up of medical centres, programmes of mass immunization, sanitation drives, adult education programmes for the weaker sections of the community, blood donation, helping patients in hospitals, helping inmates of orphanages and the specially abled group of people etc. The NSS students have also done useful work in organising campaigns for eradication of social evils, and popularization of the nationally accepted objectives like nationalism, democracy, secularism, social harmony and development of scientific temper.

Involvement of all the medical colleges of the country in the NSS activities would contribute significantly to the health status of the country, due to the sheer number of the volunteers that would be available for the cause. While the students are already exposed to the community through the posting in the Department of Community Medicine, integration with NSS would provide them the opportunity to bring about a “positive change” in the health & social status of the community, rather than just study the factors responsible for poor health as an academic activity.

With the goal to work for the betterment of society and to instil the spirit of social service among the medical students and hence make them a responsible citizens, Government Medical College, Srinagar (Uttarakhand) established a NSS unit at the college in April 2013. To create rightful knowledge on important and prevalent diseases, rallies and audio-visual sessions on AIDS, significance of polio vaccines, door-to-door awareness on immunization of pregnant women, infants and children have been carried out by this unit. Also to maintain and keep in place the pristine Mother Nature, the volunteers stepped forward to plant saplings in the community. Not only this, NSS special camp in adopted village of Shweet, Uttarakhand was also organized, which was a leap in community service for the student volunteers, where they amalgamated their medical skills with community service by distributing medicines and conducting health camp under the watchful eyes of the Programme Officer.

Apart from the overall development of the volunteers and the teachers involved in NSS, the programme of Action 1992 on National Policy on Education provides that special incentives be evolved to encourage teacher’s and student’s interest and participation. Possible incentives may include the following:-

- a) Recognition of the outstanding contribution of teachers to NSS as an extension work under the third dimension of the university system as equivalent to research work.
- b) Special incentives for teachers for contributions under NSS.
- c) Special incentives for students with outstanding records under NSS, NCC etc. at the time of their admission to college and university and also for promotion within colleges and universities. (Para no. 20, 3.3 Programme of Action 1992 on National Policy on Education by Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development)

From the above it is evident that special emphasis has been given to NSS in National Policy on Education, in which it has been proposed that every student would be expected to participate either in NSS or NCC. It is now realised that the scheme is useful for the personality development of the students, particularly in the context of the present campus situation in our country where the opportunities for personality development of students and other activities are scarce. There is thus a need for Centre and the State Governments to work towards a situation where all the students in universities, colleges and +2 level can have such opportunities through the NSS and NCC as envisaged in National Policy on Education and could also be proposed to the regulatory authority of Medical education in India, i.e. Medical Council of India.

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