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ASIA EDITION

# Digital way of learning

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**Digital way of learning**



**Singapore:** India based Bodhi Health Education has taken up the challenge of educating less literate health workers about primary healthcare services in rural India and improve their everyday service standards, but through a technical approach. Mr Abhinav Girdhar, founder of Bodhi Health Education has developed e-Learning content for complex medical topics in simplified pictorial designs in regional languages of India to be delivered through mobile gadgets like smart phones, computers or tablets in online or offline mode.

It all started when two years back, Mr Girdhar himself suffered from diarrhoea in a rural town of western India and the incompetence of local healthworkers in providing primary care, sparked a keen interest to take the initiative. He left his cushioned job at PricewaterhouseCoopers and with his wife Ms Shrutika Girdhar's support, who has experience in mobile and enterprise technology with leading MNCs in India and UK, kick started the venture.

As a first step, he developed pictorial videos in Marathi, western India's regional language, based on the curriculum prescribed by National Health Mission to explain some of the important topics to the health workers. To his surprise, Mr Girdhar got a positive response from the healthcare activists on digital learning modules as a training platform and went on to establish Bodhi Health Education as a for profit venture in April 2013.

Imparting health education through a digital platform to rural health workers could be a challenge where basic health infrastructure is still inadequate. However, this did not deter him from taking up the new task and he optimistically pointed that, "As per a McKinsey report, Africa would need to build 300 medical schools with a total training cost of over $33 billion and it would take over 20 years just to catch up with the developed world. We feel that a blended physical and online medical education model is the need of the hour. Online education is a cost effective, scalable solution wherein the knowledge of experts can be taken to underserved areas in developing countries."

Mr Girdhar believes that while online medical education can build the foundation of the training for frontline health workers, physical education can complement the understanding of topics requiring a person's presence. This would lead to much higher utilization of already created physical assets. He further insists that smartphones and internet connections have made an impressive penetration in rural India and the mobile revolution could be best leveraged to enhance healthcare ecosystem.

Citing an example, he sais, "In terms of the usage by healthcare workers, National Rural Health Mission has introduced

electronic field data collection. This is done by the front line health workers and/or the midwives after basic training is provided. The states such as Gujarat have provided basic smartphones to healthworkers for data collection. These interventions have been successful and the state governments are keenly looking for adding more services to be delivered using technology. Leveraging this existing IT infrastructure will be productive utilization of the same."

**Success so far**

Bodhi Health Education has trained total of 650 health workers for refresher training using its eLearning training solutions. The venture conducted its first pilot in Maharashtra where 70 health workers were provided refresher training in basic health and social topics. In Uttar Pradesh, Bodhi has worked with one of the leading nursing and paramedic school in providing refresher training in maternal and child health and 96 final year midwifery and nursing students attended the training.

The start up firm is supporting an affordable eye care chain in north east India by skill building of their vision assistants who are exposed to basic eye care related topics like screening for refractive errors, detecting cataract using torchlight, understanding basic signs/symptoms of night blindness, glaucoma etc.

**Funding Channels**

Bodhi Health Education founders have invested approximately $60,000 that have been utilized to develop android tablet (offline and online) and web based learning management systems. Further the venture has developed modules for health and hygiene, maternal and child health, basic eye care for vision assistants.
The start-up firm is looking for investment channels to further support and develop low bandwidth streaming technologies and up gradating of learning management systems, specialized content development and encryption.

**Partnership Approach**

Bodhi Health Education is seeking partnerships with knowledge partners including government training institutions, medical schools, nursing and paramedic schools to increase the reach and penetration of the content from the knowledge partners to various state government run public health programs and affordable hospital chains.

Mr Girdhar mentioned that, "If the health indicators have to improve in Asia and Africa, a robust partnership needs to evolve among the government bodies, healthcare chains, donor supported non-governmental organisations and healthcare training providers. Each organisation has a unique role to play. While the Government works for the welfare of the state and is responsible for the overall health indicators of the country the healthcare chains serving at the last mile drive health programs in close co-ordination with the government. For the success of their initiatives there is a need for skilled health work force and it is very important for the training organisations to work very closely in tune with the needs of the sector."