

9 Hospitals and Medical

Executive Summary

There are few medical facilities on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. To improve the situation, the Ministry of Health launched a telemedicine project in 2002. A satellite connection was established between the G. B. Pant Hospital in Port Blair and the Sri Ramachandra Medical College in Chennai to provide specialty medicine to the Islands. Now, a patient's medical history can be sent to a specialist in Chennai, who provides diagnosis and treatment through a videoconference with the patient. Besides the hospital in Port Blair, there are medical facilities at Car Nicobar and most of the larger communities. Many of these facilities suffered damage during the disaster and most of them could not respond properly to the greater demand following the earthquake.

After the earthquake, the Ministry of Health dispatched doctors, nurses, and paramedics to the most affected regions from central government hospitals. Medical camps were opened in the more remote regions and medical staff were airlifted into the camps.

Immediately after the earthquake volunteer doctors were prevented from entering the Nicobar Islands. Also, there was reluctance by the government to allow some medical NGO's from coming into the islands. However, in time, the ministry was able to help people in all the affected regions.

After the medical emergency subsided, the ministry began an immunization program to prevent an epidemic, particularly of childhood diseases, from occurring. The government also helped the children, many of whom had lost a parent, to cope with the emotional and psychological stress of the disaster. UNICEF¹ and other organizations were able to supply a great deal of medicine, water purification tablets, vitamins, and salt tablets to the islands. The ministry worked to provide safe drinking water, proper disposal of human waste, and improvements to personal hygiene. In addition mosquito netting, malathion, temephos, and other supplies were distributed to prevent insect-borne diseases.

Through all of these efforts, an epidemic was averted. The main problems were a shortage of drinking water and getting the population to use the re-hydration salts, especially among the native population.

Chapter Notes:

1. UNICEF = United Nations Children's Fund (formerly United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund).