WHEREIN LIES HAPPINESS?
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My friend was incredulous. “How can you say you are happy and satisfied treating some old villagers in some way-out village when you could be abroad making so much money?” Taken aback I replied, “Well, it is totally true when I say that I am satisfied and happy”. Not one to let up he concluded with missionary zeal. “No gold medalist in medical studies would ever do what you are doing and then claim they are happy with life!”

How could I ever make him understand the happiness and satisfaction I was getting from serving needy villagers through the Village Health Programme of the Auroville Health Centre?

How could he ever understand the joy I get whenever Kannammal, the eighty plus, wrinkled old lady at Rayapudupakkam pinches my cheek in heartfelt thanks after getting her weekly dose of medicine from me on Fridays? Having no one to even think or care for her, the fact that I was someone to whom she could turn to in distress, someone who would talk to her and listen to her, filled her with so much satisfaction that my reward every week was that pinch on my cheeks embellished with her wry old smile. Where else in the world could I get that?

How could he understand Alamelu, the 60 year old hypertensive who suffered a major stroke leaving her entire left side paralyzed? She was lying at the door of the Rayapudupakkam Subcentre one Friday morning when I got there. After many months of medication, physiotherapy and regular consultation she is back today walking in an out of the Subcentre thanking me one day for saving her life and then complaining the next that I should have let her die because her relatives are now ill treating her!! She has recently got her cataract affected left eye operated and now awaits the operation on the right so that she can see us all better.

60 year old Porkilai from Pattanur would saunter in late on Tuesday mornings to the Poothurai Subcentre after finishing off all her ritualistic obligations at the nearby temple and then start reciting her complaints of what we term KKK Syndrome. The KKK Syndrome for the uninitiated is Kai-Kaal-Kodacchal syndrome that refers to the frequent complaint of aching hands and feet that is rampant (indeed to epidemic proportions) amongst village womenfolk who toil themselves to exhaustion while their men folk are out drinking and laying around. Anemia and malnutrition as well as wear and tear of age were the main causes of Porkilai’s problems, but where would she get the money to eat all the iron rich stuff that City doctors love to prescribe? Talking to her and educating her as well as so many such ladies on the benefits of Iron rich
green leafy vegetables and Raagi millet takes up a lot of time and energy but has surely started to pay dividends. Porkilai feels better, her hemoglobin readings are improving and she now brings a few more patients in tow to get the benefits she has got from our work.

There are so many like them out there in the villages, waiting for someone to come, to talk and listen to them, to reassure them that all will be fine, to joke with them about village happenings and to well also provide some medicines and an injection once in a while. They don’t get this “human relationship” with doctors in the overcrowded, understaffed government hospitals and just cannot afford to go to the private hospitals that squeeze them dry.

How can I ever explain to my friend the happiness and satisfaction I get from these interactions with those who just need a human ear and a helping hand to give them love and care so that they can retain their human dignity.