

Not Letting Her Skills Rust



Marzia Akhtar Popi, Community Paramedic, Sunamganj

Marzia Akhtar Popi (24) was newly married in 2012 and just moved to a new village with her husband in Dowarabazar of the Sunamganj District in Bangladesh. Marzia's husband worked as a construction manager in the urban city of Sylhet and had to often work at heights risking his life. A year later when the couple had a child Marzia realised that she needed to secure the child's future by developing some skills that will help her make a living in case something ever happened to her husband.

Thankfully Marzia was already educated till the 12th grade and upon hearing about the prospects of the community paramedic profession she enrolled at a nearby institute in Sunamganj. After two-years of intensive training focusing on maternal and child healthcare and four months of practical learning at a hospital, Marzia graduated as a community paramedic.

Marzia was a very bright student and soon caught the eyes of some employers. Although she was offered a job at a city hospital she refused as she would have to stay away from home. Not knowing how else she could use her skills, Marzia soon let her newly gained knowledge rust at home for months. Until one day when her husband informed her of a news that the ASTHA project worked to establish community paramedics in rural villages to increase healthcare access.

Marzia approached the project in 2016 for support and from then on, her career really began. She started attending scientific seminars organised by ASTHA to enhance the knowledge of self-practicing community paramedics. Based on her performance and willingness to set up a practicing outlet in her village, the project donated her a medical kit-box that had all the essential equipment required to provide primary healthcare services. Soon when she opened a small pharmacy in Katakhal Bazar with the help of her husband and started providing services, the project organised a marketplace meeting where she had the opportunity to introduce herself to over 400 people in her community. With the publicity that she received as a skilled healthcare provider, combined with the aid of an outlet signage for branding provided by ASTHA, Marzia was able to attract a growing number of patients.

“I never really thought that I could do both, i.e. look after my family and at the same time make such a respectable living. The mothers and children in my community now come to me for their healthcare needs. None of this would have happened if it wasn't for the support that ASTHA gave me”, says a very satisfied Marzia.

Today, she sees over 150 patients a month and earns approximately BDT 20,000 (USD 240). She plans to set up a larger practice outlet to serve a greater number of patients in the coming days.



Marzia examining a patient at a health camp organised by ASTHA