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APONJON NEWS

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Doctors Now Available to Answer Questions by Phone: Thanks to Aponjon's New Counseling Line

After three months of testing, the Aponjon Counseling Line has recently been added to Aponjon's mobile messaging services. By dialing 16 22 7, subscribers now have the additional ability to speak with an Aponjon doctor about health concerns related to pregnancy, the postpartum period, and children less than one-year-old.

Aponjon, a USAID-supported project, delivers stage-based essential health messages to expectant and new mothers and their families across Bangladesh via mobile phones.

"If the child is too sick, I take her to the doctor, but I'm glad that I can now get remedies for minor health issues or problems over the telephone," said Mrs. Tahmina, mother of a 9-month-old, of the new service. "It has really taken a great load off my mind."

Tahmina Sultana Rima, a mother who lives near Dhaka, initially registered with Aponjon to get the health information messages. However, as time went by, she wanted additional health advice for her and her child. She was very happy that she was able to talk to a doctor about these things now.

Aponjon clients generally fall into two categories – expecting mothers and new mothers with children less than one-year-old. Family members can also register for the service to receive messages created separately and exclusively for them. And any subscribers with a phone number registered to the Aponjon service can call for a doctor's advice. In June, 223 new mothers, 405 expecting mothers, and 496 family members called the Aponjon counseling line and talked to our doctors.

"The first responsibility here is to ensure delivery of the right medical information to the patients," said Dr. Kaniz Fatema, one of the doctors who answer the Aponjon Counseling Line. "Since the patient is not

present before our eyes, we try reaching the diagnosis through discussion with them. Then, if we feel that the patient is more serious than to be dealt over phone, we suggest the type of doctor the patient needs to see. If and when required, we advise them to get to the nearest hospital or health facility."

Aponjon is well aware of the limitations of providing distant medical advice to clients by doctors over the telephone. This is kept in mind while practicing judicious and cautious medical consultancy for patients. As a result, a large number of referrals to nearby hospitals are done through the service. Advice is also given on eating a balanced diet and infant nutrition.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) provided seed funding for the program, as well as other international partners, including Johnson & Johnson. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of the Government of Bangladesh and the Access to Information program of the Prime Minister's Office are the official technical partners. Other than that, Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd. is the first corporate partner and donor. As corporate partner, there is also Lal Teer Seeds Ltd. of the Multimode Group, who provides in-kind support for campaign through their channels. Rahimafrooz Superstores Ltd. is the retail partner of Aponjon. BRAC, MaMoni, Social Marketing Company, Smiling Sun Clinic Program of NHSDP and Infolady program of Dnet are working to spread Aponjon across all doorsteps of the all 64 districts of the country through the health workers (i.e. Aponjon Community Agents).

Dr. Fatema stressed that doctors speaking with subscribers are "overtly conscious and careful" about prescribing medications: "For instance, we usually do not advise any antibiotics over telephone, rather listen to the problems and advise them to get to a doctor directly so that he can understand the situation and advise accordingly." She said clients also share their experiences with other doctors and ask for relevant advice, or read their laboratory report findings and ask

for the Aponjon doctor's reflection on their health and ask for advice.

The core service provided by Aponjon to its clients is a mobile based health information service provided according to the specific stage of pregnancy or child's age. These messages are sent to the client's mobile phone twice a week. Subscribers can receive the information by text or voice message. Aponjon is being implemented in Bangladesh as part of an international program called the Mobile Alliance for Maternal Action (MAMA). With an objective of reaching the millennium development goals of reduction of maternal and infant mortality, MAMA is being rolled out in Bangladesh, India and South Africa. In

Bangladesh, the program is being implemented by Dnet under the USAID-supported Maternal and Child Health Integrated Program (MCHIP), and is a great example of a joint venture between the government, national and international partners and organizations.

The Aponjon Counseling Line has quickly impressed subscribers and become their service of choice. Aponjon messages are designed to deliver information to registered mothers and family members at the optimal times. For instance, pregnant women receive information on nutrition, danger signs, and when and why to visit a doctor. Mothers of newborns receive information on ways to ensure the healthy development of their child, vaccination schedules and reminders, best foods at different ages, and ways to remain healthy themselves after delivery. The messages are also developed with different mothers in mind—those from all parts of the country and the society, including urban and rural

Before deploying the Aponjon Counseling Line, a number of steps were taken. Four female doctors experienced in Gynecology and Obstetrics and Child Health were chosen during the testing phase, and training on delivery of health information over the counseling line was done by Dr. Umme Salma Jahan Meena of USAID, Dr. Fida Mehran of Dnet, and Dr. Shahnuja of Synesis IT Ltd. Two consultants prepared Guidelines for the Aponjon Counseling Line, which provides helpful instructions for the Doctors and Call Center Agents who support the Counseling Line. Aponjon had already gone through a vigorous selection process to select a call center organization to host the counseling line. Synesis IT Ltd, a local call center organization, was selected as the firm to provide the service. News of the Aponjon Counseling Line launch was communicated to some subscribers through voice and text messages, and the service has been in use on a test basis for three months. In the near future, Aponjon has plans to go for a full scale launch of the service.



Doctors taking call from Aponjon Subscribers

areas. In addition to input from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, national and international health and communication experts participated in creating the messages.

Aponjon will continue to introduce other new services in an effort to increase its usability and to reach more subscribers.

health information for expecting and new mothers through mobile phone
Mother & child's Aponjon, Call 16 22 7 for registration

Beximco Pharmaceuticals and Aponjon: A Strong Friendship

The idea began with a simple thought: we live in a society together and have certain responsibilities to give something back for all we've received. This sense of social responsibility is what led Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd. to its relationship with Aponjon. Therefore, when Dnet began their health information initiative, Aponjon sought out—and received—Beximco's support.

Recently, Aponjon staff met again with Mr. Rabbur Reza, Beximco's Chief Operating Officer. Key parts of their discussion follow:

Aponjon: How did you become interested in a health initiative like Aponjon?



Conversation between Aponjon team and Mr. Rabbur Reza, Beximco's Chief Operating Officer

R. Reza: Aponjon is unlike any other health and information service on the market, their technology is innovative and they are committed to the social development for the people of Bangladesh. Because their approach is so different many organizations like Johnson & Johnson, USAID and the Government of Bangladesh are involved with their programs, and from these organizations we came to know Aponjon.

Aponjon: Do you plan to continue supporting Aponjon and if so, for how long?

R. Reza: Beximco Pharmaceutical continues to support and showcase Aponjon services by displaying propaganda in magazines and newspapers that we produce and distribute, connecting doctors all over Bangladesh with Aponjon and supporting their programs financially. We will continue to support Aponjon's reliable service in the future.

Aponjon: Did you foresee any challenges of partnering with Aponjon when they first approached you with their technology based service?

R. Reza: Aponjon has seen Dnet perform in other social service programs; therefore, we had a firm belief that the Aponjon initiative would run successfully. We had not however, seen Aponjon's mobile phone based service for expecting and new mothers, especially in the context of Bangladesh. After seeing the involvement of different donors and international partners, we are confident that this service will grow into a quality and popular initiative.

Aponjon: How do you see the future relationship between Aponjon and Beximco in terms of crossing the national boundary into the international arena?

R. Reza: If Aponjon ever wishes to work internationally, Beximco will try to stay with Aponjon. Beximco Pharamceuticals Ltd. is currently working in a number of underdeveloped countries, so if opportunity presents itself, we would like to stay beside Aponjon as partners.

Aponjon: Aponjon has recently started a new service under its umbrella – the Aponjon Counseling Line- where doctors advise mothers over the telephone. What are Beximco's thoughts in regards to this new service?

R. Reza: We congratulate Aponjon for their 'Counseling Line' initiative; however, we believe that it is more important for a doctor to give the right medical advice than to prescribe medicine. On principle, we don't believe in prescribing medicine to those people who can be cured by following precautions and proper lifestyle. That being said, we commend Aponjon's initiative for providing health services to remote areas of Bangladesh and Beximco is truly satisfied to be connected with such a noble initiative.



Mr. Rabbur Reza, Beximco's Chief Operating Officer

Mother's smile is the inspiration to move ahead

“Mrs. Bokul rushed to my clinic the other day after getting the first voice call from Aponjon. She never paid heed to such health information before but was serious about Aponjon’s message;” said Jebunnesa, the Aponjon community agent from Haragachh union in Rangpur. Jebunnesa began as a health worker at the Smiling Sun Clinic in 2000, and later as an Aponjon Community Agent in February 2013. “People in remote areas are too careless about health matters and they don’t try to understand” said Jebunnesa. Helping people understand, learn and think differently about health matters motivates Jebunnesa to continue working for the people.



Jebunnesa in her working place

Recently, Jebunnesa has begun promoting Aponjon when she noticed clients’ interest in technology. Initially clients faced some difficulties in subscribing to the voice message service; however, Jebunnesa solved this problem with a quick competency lesson. “These days, although the literacy level is not yet 100%, everyone has mobile phones in their hands. They listen to music, look at images, and they are not afraid to adopt and adapt to this new technology based service,” said the Smiling Sun Clinic health worker. Jebunnesa, with her smile, expressed her satisfaction with the outcome she has brought. So far she has managed to register 214 clients to the Aponjon service and next month she will register an additional 50 people to this service. Jebunnesa finds peace of mind as she runs from door to door, staying close to the people, and making them think twice about their health concerns.

“Aponjon” is coming closer to the heart in the field

Bernard Christopher Halsana

“As usual, a sense of anxiety ran through my mind as I began my journey from Dhaka to Rajbari for the Aponjon training program. Even though I have participated in a number of similar trainings, I wondered if health workers would accept the Aponjon training. I know this fear is totally unfounded, because every time the training ends, there is positive feedback. It was no different this time. We were going through the training program at Rajbari, when suddenly one of the trainee health workers, Geeta Biswas, stood up and wanted to speak. She wanted to call her younger sister, who was four months’ pregnant, to tell her about Aponjon and the process of registration through a mobile phone. I continue to be amazed at the degree of interest she and other participants have shown during my trainings. In Trishal, Mymensingh district, we explained the details of the Aponjon service during the training. We described how health workers visit each household in their catchment area once or twice a month to register mothers for a service which provides two messages per week to expecting or new mothers and one message per week to family members. Participants were excited to learn this. Ms. Hasina said, “Such a health service will make life a lot easier and extend the reach of services to more people than ever before”.



Training session with health workers

Aponjon’s Counseling Line even makes it possible for subscribers to dial 16 22 7 and talk to a doctor directly about their problems. I see these enthusiastic faces every day, which only amplifies my love for the program, the work and the cause.”

Aponjon reached the milestone of 80,000 subscribers

Aponjon is advancing steadily towards achieving its objectives – thanks to the continuous and tireless effort from the people behind it. During the month of June 2013, Aponjon reached a subscriber base of 80,000 and beyond. Aponjon has managed to reach this significant milestone in a short amount of time through the whole-hearted cooperation and commitment from community



Celebrating 80,000 subscribers milestone

agents, outreach and sales partners such as BRAC, Mamoni, Smiling Sun Clinic (NHSDP), Social Marketing Company and Infolady (Dnet). Further, Aponjon Fairs that were held in different areas of the country helped to reach new subscribers. Aponjon is determined to make their service available free to all people.

Celebrated National Safe Motherhood Day

May 28, 2013, the National Safe Motherhood Day in Bangladesh, organized by the Directorate General of Family Planning (DGFP) and Channel i, celebrated the different sectors working in maternal health who continue to strengthen their resolution to ensure safe motherhood for every mother in Bangladesh. This program was inaugurated by the Honorable State Minister, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Dr. Capt. (Rtd.) Mozibur Rahman Fakir, MP who introduced Aponjon in his speech, and commented on the invaluable work by Aponjon in Bangladesh. Aponjon was even featured in one of the stalls, hosted by MCHIP, where a video of Rizawana Rashid Auni, the Chief Program Coordinator of MAMA spoke about Aponjon's service in Bangladesh.



Active Aponjon team is in the fair stall

The event was a great success with Aponjon being one of the stars of the day, with special appreciation and recognition from all that were present there.

Aponjon fair began its journey

“O Mother, stay healthy, keep Aponjon (dear ones) at your service by your side,” sang the Baul (traditional rural folk singer) to thousands of enthusiastic visitors. This is how the morning of 29 June began in Brahmanbaria at the Aponjon Fair. One booth offered free medical checkups from a doctor, another booth



Doctor is talking with patients in Aponjon fair

offered health information services for expecting and new mothers from a Specialist Obstetrician from the regional District Hospital, and the last booth helped people register for Aponjon. In addition, the fair presented an ongoing cultural program for people in the waiting area and for those that came to visit. Even after the fair ends, 15 representatives will continue to work at the district to assist directly in registration.

Launching Aponjon Gift Pack

April 24, 2013, The USAID-funded Aponjon service introduced the “Sponsor-a-Mother” gift pack at the Agora Gulshan (RM Center). By purchasing a gift



Launching moment of gift pack

pack, an individual can sponsor an underprivileged mother so that her Aponjon mobile health services are free of cost. Agora, the first superstore chain of the country, has joined forces with Dnet to promote and sell this gift pack as part of their Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR). For the initial stage, the “Sponsor-a-Mother” gift pack will be available at Dhanmondhi, Uttara outlet. Thirty percent of mothers live below the poverty line and 20 percent of pregnant mothers currently use mobile phones. Because of the “Sponsor-a-Mother” gift pack, these women will now receive free Aponjon services from this donation. To learn more about the Aponjon mobile health service, dial 16 22 7 from any mobile device.



health information for expecting and new mothers through mobile phone
Mother & child's Aponjon, Call 16 22 7 for registration



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