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Global Youth Meet on Health

Youngsters to campaign against tobacco - Hindustan Times

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HT Correspondent

“Today I know tobacco cannot be sold within 100 feet of any school. I will educate my friends and together we would fight off anybody selling it near our school,” says a confident class XI student Sudhanshu Raikwar of Karnataka Vidya Niketan. Chips in Surya Punjabi, a student of Queens’ College, “In any house, women and children can wield more influence.

If we can convince these two people in every house, particularly the rural areas about the bad effects of tobacco, we can change the picture for better.” Echoes Ashwini Nadkarni of Class X from Karnataka Vidya Mandir, “The message can be reached far more effectively through children.”

The students were interacting with media persons after returning from the first Global Youth Meet on Health (GYM 2006) held at New Delhi and Agra, which advocating a strategy “students as agent of change” believing that the message can surely reach far more people through youngsters.

Surya, Ashwini, Sudhanshu and Palkesh Asawa from Choithram International School were among the 50 students from across the country and 200 from 37 other countries, who attended the GYM 2006 organised by HRIDAY (Health Related Information Dissemination Amongst Youth) and SHAN (Student Health Action Network).

After a thought-provoking participation at the GYM 2006 from November 14 to November 19, the four youngsters are brimming with confidence to motivate their friends for the cause of anti-tobacco campaign.

“However, the health meet was not just about anti-tobacco campaign. We had daily two plenary sessions on topics ranging from policies to combat tobacco, alcohol and drugs, on diet and nutrition, measures to prevent HIV and also how to promote responsible sexual attitudes and behaviours and also policies to protect environment,” says Sudhanshu. They also had small group discussions on these themes daily.

The four students had already participated in Madhya Pradesh Voluntary Health Association’s (MPVHA) anti-tobacco campaign as part of The Cigarette and Tobacco Act 2003 involving 24 schools of the City.

Palkesh says, “We went there not knowing about the outcome. We had carried our presentation material like display sheets, a/v clippings etc. And now we have returned with a huge experience plus a concrete will about what and how to do it in coming years in the anti-tobacco campaign.”

For example, in case of low literacy in rural areas, emphasis should be on audio-visual campaign, Sudhanshu says. Adds Surya, “We discussed these strategies and also exchanged notes about methodology.”

Apart from the audio-visual campaign in rural areas, the other major areas these students plan to focus are: creating a watchdog for strict implementation of anti-tobacco policies, counselling and putting peer pressure on students to avoid use of tobacco products, no junk food in canteen and effective use of women and children to push forth the anti-tobacco message.

“We have been spreading the word in our respective schools after we came back and our teachers and school management have assured us support for sustained campaign,” Ashwini says adding, “We would involve other schools too.”

Says Sandeep Agrawal, MPVHA coordinator who had attended the meet with the students, “The meet also discussed on how to fight loop holes in the policy and strategy against people misusing the loopholes.”

One thing, which made a lasting impression on students was interaction with Badminton star Pullela Gopichand, who said he refused to feature in a cola commercial as he had seen its bad effects in his rural home place in Andhra Pradesh.

The students were also excited to see face-to-face Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who inaugurated the meet on November 14 at New Delhi.

The participants were then taken to Delhi from November 15 to 18 after which they came back again to Delhi for the concluding function on November 19, which was attended by Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dixit.