

# THE MANAGER

CASE STUDY FOR TRAINING AND GROUP DISCUSSION

## Community Leaders Find Local Resources for Health Services

**Scenario** FOR THREE YEARS, a clinic run by the nongovernmental organization New Dawn has been delivering babies and providing prenatal and postnatal care for women in the market town of Paharganj. The state has been providing the clinic with space at no cost in a little-used government building. Unfortunately, a new state water resources project is taking over the building, and the clinic must move. If the clinic closes, local women will have to travel 30 kilometers to the district capital to get the care they need in a modern health care facility.

Dr. Nirmala Sharma, the clinic's chief medical officer, has invited several community leaders to meet with her to discuss the challenge of space. It is a warm spring day in Paharganj. The sounds of diesel trucks, cows, sheep, and children drift in the window. Fields of yellow mustard reach toward the horizon.

"I am very upset about the clinic closing!" said Mrs. Sharmala Punj, a retired school principal. "My daughter-in-law lost her first two babies when we had no maternity clinic nearby. Now I have a fat and healthy grandson and a lovely little granddaughter. We need this clinic to stay open. I can't believe that the state is making us move out!"

"I am upset, too," said Mrs. Hema Parvati, wife of a local businessman. "Shouldn't the government provide us with a new space to replace the one they are taking away?"

"I wish that were possible," replied Mrs. Radha Garg, a serene woman and a representative on the local government council. "The state is not obligated to provide us with a site. It is up to us to find a solution to this problem."

"It warms our hearts to know that the community is helping us to find a solution," said Dr. Sharma. "We appreciate the work you and other leaders have done to encourage use of our services. Our beds are full, and we have delivered many healthy babies." The leaders nodded to show they recognized this expression of thanks.

"New Dawn has conducted an assessment of the clinic's needs, assuming we would have to build a new site or renovate an existing building," continued Dr. Sharma. "We will need building materials, a construction supervisor, laborers, funding, permission to build, and a lease. Ideally, we would like to expand our operations, which would require new equipment and beds. In any case, our first priority is a new space." She turned to V. K. Singh, a community activist. "Have you spoken to the community-based organization 'Economic Development Trust' about providing space there?"

"Yes. The Trust has offered the use of a building in the corner of its property," replied Mr. Singh. "It touches the outside wall and could have a separate entrance, but the roof, walls, and ceilings must be repaired. The clinic may use the building if the needed repairs and renovations are done."

“This is excellent news,” beamed Dr. Sharma. “Unfortunately, New Dawn does not have resources to pay for repairs and renovations.” She turned to Captain Sengupta, retired from the Army. “I am sure that you will have some suggestions.”

“I know the building that Mr. Singh is talking about,” said Captain Sengupta. “It is small, but the location is convenient. Will we be allowed to add new rooms if needed?” Mr. Singh nodded as the Captain continued. “I have worked with a local builder. I could approach him about getting materials at a discount.”

Mrs. Punj frowned. “We should approach several builders if we want to get all the materials we need at a low cost—or even at no cost.”

“Captain, perhaps you would be kind enough to approach several builders about contributing to this project,” suggested Dr. Sharma, looking at Captain Sengupta. He nodded his agreement.

“We will need some laborers, also,” said Mrs. Punj. “What about the men who were recently laid off when the milk processing plant closed? They might be willing to volunteer their labor for this project while they seek new jobs.”

“We might get a man to volunteer as a supervisor, but I doubt that men will volunteer as laborers,” said Mrs. Garg. “Let’s approach the women who are learning how to manage home building and improvement projects through a small loan program. I have observed them working on their projects. Perhaps they can help with our construction phase.”

“We will still need money for our project,” said Mrs. Punj, interrupting Mrs. Garg. “We can’t expect to get everything done for free.”

“You are right, Mrs. Punj,” said Dr. Sharma, calmly. “In another village where New Dawn works, we held a raffle and raised enough money to purchase some needed equipment. Do you think Paharganj would be receptive to a raffle?”

“Yes, I think we would get a good response,” said Mrs. Parvati. “A small generator would be popular. My husband could donate one. A radio would be suitable,

also. I will consult with my husband about whom to approach about donations.”

“We have identified a building site, a materials supplier, possible supervisors and laborers, and a funding source,” said Dr. Sharma. “I am very pleased. Without your support, the clinic would have to leave this wonderful community. But we cannot start our project unless we have permission to build and a lease. We must start this paperwork right away.” She looked expectantly at Mrs. Punj.

“My oldest son is a lawyer in the district capital,” said Mrs. Punj proudly. “I will ask him what paperwork we will need to take care of. He knows how important this clinic is to me. He will help us and provide his services for free.”

Dr. Sharma smiled at the leaders. “I must express my heartfelt thanks for your valuable support for this clinic, not just today, but over the three years since we opened.” She paused. “Perhaps it is time to think about formalizing this valuable group. I suggest that we form a community health committee to oversee the construction effort and consider longer-term plans to sustain the clinic and improve the community’s health.” The leaders nodded, looking pleased. “Please come to our next meeting with ideas about other people in the community who might be willing to serve on this committee.”

## Discussion Questions

1. What resources are the local leaders thinking about besides funding?
2. What potential partners and resources have the chief medical officer and community leaders identified? Looking at the content of the issue and considering your own experience, what other partners and resources might be useful for a clinic of this type?
3. What strengths and weaknesses do you see in the way the group is working toward a solution to their problem?

### QUESTION 1 What resources is the group thinking about besides funding?

The group is thinking about resources from a broad perspective. In addition to funding, resources that the group discusses include:

- space
- equipment
- beds
- building materials
- a construction supervisor
- laborers
- donated items (for a raffle)
- legal services

In addition, the community leaders are also valuable resources for this clinic.

### QUESTION 2 What potential partners and resources have the chief medical officer and community leaders identified? Looking at the content of the issue and considering your own experience, what other partners and resources might be useful for a clinic of this type?

Partners and resources mentioned in the scenario include:

- state government, which has been providing space at no cost for three years;
- a community-based organization (Economic Development Trust), which has offered free space in a corner of its property;

- local builders, who may provide building materials for free or at a discount;
- unemployed men, who may be willing to volunteer to supervise the construction project while they seek new jobs;
- local women participating in a small loan project, and who may be willing to volunteer as laborers for the construction work;
- local business people, who might donate generators and other electrical equipment;
- a lawyer, to handle the building permit and prepare a lease.

Other types of partners and resources that might be useful for a clinic of this type include:

- local businesses that could provide furniture, if the clinic expands;
- volunteers to maintain, clean, or provide security for the facility;
- individuals who could lobby the state government for space, equipment, or other resources that the clinic needs;
- nongovernmental or government health personnel who could provide additional health services to the community;
- local drivers or taxi companies, to provide transportation for emergency obstetric care;
- a nearby university or training institute, to conduct client satisfaction surveys or other community assessments.

**QUESTION 3** What strengths and weaknesses do you see in the way the group is working toward a solution to their problem?

New Dawn and the community leaders are moving forward in finding a new space and meeting their various resource needs related to building or renovating the space. At the same time, the process could be improved. For example:

- We do not know how New Dawn conducted its assessment of resource needs related to their facility. Did the NGO's staff take all community perspectives into account?
- It is not clear whether this group of community leaders has any representatives from economically disadvantaged people in the community. The leaders who speak up all have some standing in the community. Perhaps a community health committee could benefit from having members from, and hearing the perspective of, the disadvantaged sector.
- The decision-making process in the meeting seems rather informal. Does everyone feel comfortable about speaking out? The group might consider using more structured participatory brainstorming and decision-making methods to ensure that all voices are heard. These methods may be particularly vital in the future if the community health committee has members from different sectors.

- It appears that the clinic is providing a valued service to the community. Perhaps the demand for the clinic's services is sufficient to warrant expanding operations. New Dawn and the community health committee might consider conducting a community assessment to explore interest (or lack of interest) in expansion. A strategic planning exercise might also be useful for identifying the community's long-range health needs and developing ideas for ways to take advantage of this move. The committee needs to plan for meeting future needs.
- The group could consider how to encourage the state take more responsibility for meeting local health needs. For example, community leaders could develop a more organized response to the loss of their free space. They may wish to involve local individuals with political connections and ask them to negotiate with the state government for other resources, such as equipment or supplies, to make up for the loss of the clinic's space.

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