2016 has been a big year for SOFA. The office is now shifted to a new premises built 1 kilometer away from the hospital campus with its own reservoir for farmers and its studies post 10th due to her family's inability to continue. She (along with four other girls) received help as part of ‘THI’s scholarship programme, completed 12th standard successfully, and returned to work with us. She is now, a cashier at SOFA (Thalapatti Organic Farmers’ Association), and is the breakdowner of her family, supporting her mother and younger sister. Past her recruitment with us, we realised that there may be others like her. We have been able to mobilise sufficient funds this year to support the few children willing to pursue education after their 12th standard up to 12th standard.

At the hospital, we are excited to have a wonderful new addition to the operation theatre – laparoscopy. It is a big step for us (and indeed, for the entire area) to be able to perform minimally invasive surgeries at a much lower cost than other hospitals. Dr. Gnanaraj from Coimbatore, an expert in laparoscopy, has been working on us, performing on the same in rural areas. He visits the hospital once a month, and has been training our very own Dr. Rani in the required techniques.

As for other happenings, a dental health facility was started in our hospital in June. We have Dr. Thillaiharan from Narur visiting once a month for check-ups and procedures. The number of patients coming in for this has been steadily increasing.

We are glad to say that we have been able to take in many patients who were rejects at other hospitals elsewhere, due to financial reasons, or a reluctance to take risks. We have taken such cases to the best of our ability, and have managed to be successful in many cases. One of the reasons we could do this is because of the EU aid we now have. The presence of the ventilator, and specialised care, has been a big support. We have also found it very useful for surgical patients. We are very glad to have such a unit.

The community health development has been an ongoing very well indeed. The hypertension programmes, wherein senior citizens’ blood pressure measurement through field visits, and health audits, was recently evaluated by UCSF (University of California, San Francisco). They found the compliance rate (rate of patients regularly following their course of BP medication) to be very high. Suffle to say the evaluation went very well – we succeeded with flying colours. We are now looking forward to further gains.

Another aspect of field work, the school health programme, has also been continuing with students of different age groups. Over the past 3 years, they have got much more comfortable, and are able to open up and participate in the classes. We note some small but essential changes in the students following basic hygiene like nail cutting and hand washing are done more commonly, and we see it paying off in terms of reduction of diseases like scabies. These young children have not only changed their own practices, but have also taken to it other people, spreading the awareness and helping friends and family. It is heartening to see the strong effect of being able to “catch um early”, and it encourages us to take this further.

Pongal Agrains’ Association has also had an eventful year. We inaugurated a new office and welcomed 20 new members as artisans this year. With the help of training, some interesting items have begun to make their appearance: before embroidering rather than just embroidery on pre-made clothes. Also, using the impacts of forgone-based design (Devika, Pongal has begun to turn the “waste” into profit (that would otherwise be burnt) into small articles like soft toys for babies, key chains, earrings and necklaces – all with the trademark Pongal Agrains’ hand made/ hand dyed. The artisans centre now has a show and sell their handicrafts at different exhibitions.

The nurse training programme at the hospital has been very promising. We had it students pass the course last year – 3 in nursing, and 1 in lab training. We have the same number of students in the second year currently, as well as 6 more in their first year of training, all are working hard and learning at the hospital.

Thank you all for trusting us and being part of us. Friends of Sittilingi and the Donor Partners are the pillars which support our endeavour. May the New Year bring fun and joy to you and your dear ones.

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