



“Saathiya” – A Youth-friendly Initiative in Family Planning

A household survey conducted in Lucknow, India, revealed that a majority of women marry by 18 and that most men are married by 21 years of age. By 19 years of age 66 percent of the women have had at least one pregnancy. Spouses and friends are the primary sources of family planning information for young married couples, and only 58 percent of respondents reported that they had ever used contraceptives, most of which are condoms purchased by men from pharmacies.

To address these issues, PSP-One designed an innovative Public Private Partnership model to meet the reproductive health needs of young married couples in urban India. Named “Saathiya”, or ‘trusted partner’ in Hindi, the program was launched on October 26, 2007. It focuses on helping young married couples in Lucknow, India make informed choices about when to start childbearing and how to manage their fertility.

The partnership consists of a broad coalition of medical providers and contraceptive manufacturers led by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) funded Private Sector Partnerships-One (PSP-One) project.

Lucknow’s medical community is enthusiastically supporting the “Saathiya” program, with 150 pharmacists and 150 Indian System of Medicine providers (ISMPs) having undergone a comprehensive training program to strengthen their family planning knowledge and counseling skills. 50 gynecologists and family doctors have voluntarily participated in “Saathiya” orientation sessions, and many doctors have lent their expertise to the provider training workshops. Organizations partnering with this program include the Retail Chemists’ Association, Lucknow; the National Integrated Medical Association; the Lucknow Obstetrics and Gynecology Society; and the Lucknow Branch of the Indian Medical Association.

Research worldwide confirms that young people prefer to obtain family planning information and products from the private sector, and that short-acting methods are those most frequently sought. “Saathiya” has partnered with a variety of contraceptive manufacturers to offer condoms (JK Ansell Limited), emergency contraception (Win-Medicare Private Limited), low dose oral contraceptive pills (GlaxoSmithKline Pharmaceuticals Limited) and CycleBeads (Ross Life Cycle Products) to young married couples through the trained chemists and ISMP providers. Each manufacturer is contributing inputs such as product samples, promotional material for doctors, and consumer advertising support.

These partnerships are complemented by a “Saathiya” promotional campaign that uses local media, such as radio, print materials, billboards, street theater and provider signage,

and in-store/in-clinic materials, to create awareness of the program. A critical addition to the program is a toll-free “Saathiya” helpline — a private, friendly, and confidential service provided by counselors trained in the areas of reproductive health and family planning who can refer callers to Saathiya pharmacists or doctors for products and services. Separate toll-free helpline numbers for men and women are accessible from land lines and mobile phones in Lucknow, making information available from 12 noon to 12 midnight, seven days a week.