

6. Creating Patient Support Groups

As an ASHA, you should try to form groups of patients diagnosed with hypertension, diabetes and those on cancer treatment. Patients/friends/families/frontline workers can form these groups to help each other by bringing them together. Setting up and managing a patient support group does not require medical qualifications. All it needs is compassion, an ability to form groups conduct meetings and ensure that members are sensitive to each other's needs.

Patient support groups help patients and their family members by providing mutual support, providing information about diseases, raising awareness about complications, countering discrimination and stigma attached to a particular disease and enabling support for treatment continuation and changes in lifestyle behaviour. As an ASHA, you should ensure that individuals who are part of marginalised groups and have a disease condition are also encouraged and supported to become part of these groups. You will speak at first to individual patient with a particular condition and tell them about the benefits of participating in such a group. Then you could even start with 2-3 individuals and their families/friends and enable regular meetings. Slowly people will join as word spreads.

As you complete your training in this book, you will have learnt a lot about these non-communicable diseases. You will have understood that all of them share several common features, particularly in relation to the modifiable risk factors - diet, physical activity, use of tobacco and alcohol. All of these can be addressed through health promotion efforts. Undertaking health promotion is a very important part of addressing non communicable diseases. There will be initial difficulties especially since it is hard to change behaviours, but with patience and practice you will become more confident in helping people. This will make you a trusted member of the community. Remember that you can always go to the ANM, nurse or medical officer in your PHC to clarify your doubts.

