

A brief report of the First Alumni Meet of CSMCH, JNU



The First Alumni Meet of the CSMCH was held on 21st January 2018 (Sunday) in the Committee Room of JNU's Convention Centre. The meet brewed a concoction of emotions, as nostalgia, camaraderie, respect and resolve filled the room. It was attended by more than seventy-five alumni and an equal number of students. Two of the founding faculty, Prof. D. Banerji and Prof. Imrana Qadeer, graced the occasion along with all the present faculty.



ALUMNI MEET 2018

Session 1: Setting the tone

(Chair: Prof. Ramila Bisht)

The first session began with a round of introduction with everyone present in the room introducing themselves and their journeys. From those who had laid the foundations of the centre to the most recent entrants, all joined in celebrating the role the centre had played in their individual and collective experiences of life. ‘What is social medicine’ is a question that students across batches have often grappled with. The most beautiful answer to this question came from Prof. Qadeer, who said ‘social medicine is an infection, and its source is here (CSMCH)’. It infected us with a vision of public health that continues to inspire and guide us for a healthier, better, and a more just world.

This unique vision of public health has been the core of the centre’s philosophy since its inception, and Prof. Banerji’s speech bore the testimony to that. In 1971, it was courageous to start a health centre that was located in the social sciences school rather than in a medical college. JNU, as well as the centre,

was imagined not as an elitist space but a university where inclusivity was taught and practiced. At the level of knowledge production in the centre, the effort was to continuously produce problem-oriented, not discipline-oriented, scholarship. There was persistent emphasis on interdisciplinarity and alternative thought, teaching and practice of health.

Instead of going to ‘experts’ or the agenda-driven market, the centre always went to the people to understand their experiences and place them centrally in academia. Prof. Banerji concluded, should continue to be heart of our present and future work within and beyond the centre.

The legacy, however, has been under threat in the recent past. Anti-JNU sentiments are common today, adding another battle to the long list of battles we are now required to fight. But

Prof. Qadeer gave us hope in her speech by saying that JNU is an idea which cannot be destroyed, and that this gathering stood witness to our collective strength. This strength will be tested because of the enormous challenges that public health is facing today. Instead of comprehensiveness in public health, we have disassociation and disintegration; budget spending on health is still very low; privatization has overpowered state-delivered care; medical education is in a mess; and community-oriented approaches have been taken over by technology and experts. But these challenges are not isolated from the context in which they are occurring, and it is important to link the two. Today, Constitution, rule of law and institutions, and democracy itself are being undermined. In this difficult time, opined Prof. Qadeer, it is only our solidarity and collective work that can help us uphold our vision and values to give back to the centre, to JNU and to the society.



Session 2: Alumni Perspectives on Knowledge and Skills

(Chair: Prof. Ritu Priya)

The Chair acknowledged the rich diversity of alumni, both in terms of their geographical location and in terms of the roles they were playing. She invited their feedback on what all in the course structure is indispensable and needs to be retained, and what all is weak or lacking, and so, needs to be strengthened/added. The feedback shared by alumni is as follows:

- **Perspectives:** The essence of CSMCH lies in its unique pedagogy and approach towards expanding the concept of medicine beyond technology and contextualizing it in its social moorings. However, this framework should delve deeper than just class and explore other axes of stratification such as caste, gender and sexuality in health research. There is a need to incorporate the discrimination and exclusion framework in the curriculum to equip the young researchers with a better understanding of health of marginalized communities. ‘Work’ needs to be incorporated as one of the social determinants of health.

- **Course Structure:** Research Methodology needs to be strengthened, keeping mixed-method framework at the fore. Specific inputs are required with respect to bio-statistics and data analysis softwares, and expertise of alumni may be used in this regards. Courses on Health Technology Assessment, Health Economics (one which is rooted in Public Health) and Strategic Communication are needed. In addition, students need to be acquainted with the current global health language (for instance, SDGs). Pedagogical methods like the Journal Club, which force students to read, need to continue.

- **Field Activity:** Concerns were raised regarding the short duration of field exposure, and a much longer and rigorous grass-root immersion program was suggested.

- **Dissemination:** Taking Centre’s research work to its audience is crucial. While a culture of publishing needs to be cultivated, this will not be enough. Government functionaries need to be approached through seminars, and independent researchers working in field need to be reached through conferences.

- **Institutional Linkages:** Linkages with Civil Society Organizations would expose students to diverse field realities, and in-turn, would bring the organization’s work in academic spaces. Linkages with other Public Health institutions will contribute to overall development of the discipline.

The Chair thanked the alumni and concluded with the idea of undertaking big Public Health research by developing collaborations.

ALUMNI MEET 2018



Session 3: Setting-up the Alumni Network

(Chair: Prof. Mohan Rao)

The post-lunch session was centred on expectations from a formal Alumni Network. The session began with students presenting their wish-list and introducing three of their recent initiatives. An earlier presentation by representatives of Alumni Association of JNU (AAJ) also fed into this session. This was followed by discussion in ten small groups consisting of alumni, faculties and students. Each group then shared their ideas on how the network could take shape, and what it should be doing. Finally, a ten-member 'Alumni Working Group' (six alumni, two faculties and two students) was formed. The day ended with a tour of enhanced web-page of CSMCH, and a short but very sweet documentary film.

Student Presentations:

● Expectations:
Firstly, the network should act as a resource network for sharing knowledge and experience, should try to provide research support (both technical and logistical), and should be able to exchange information regarding internships and career opportunities. Second, it should act as an interface where the CSMCH community could actively deliberate on and pursue public health issues. It should act as a collective forum where public health movements may be built and strengthened. And third, it should act as a social network which helps its members to preserve their alternative ideologies and the critical values of Public Health.



- Starting a biannual e-Journal: It has been envisaged as a medium for research scholars from the Centre, and beyond, to publish their work. This initiative is being conceptualized under the guidance of Dr. Sunita Reddy, Dr. Nemthianngai and Dr. Prachin.
- Organizing annual Young Scholar's Conference: It is being formulated as a platform for research scholars from the Centre, and beyond, to present their work. This initiative is being developed under the guidance of Dr. Sunita Reddy and Dr. Vikas Bajpai.
- Pursuing monthly Student Lecture Series: This activity has been started to maintain the Centre's vibrant culture of discussion on contemporary public health issues and to facilitate peer-learning. Present and past students of the Centre, or of other Centres of JNU, people working in field, activists... a wide range of speakers can be a part of this initiative.

Ideas from the subsequent Group Discussions:

- A formal Alumni Association needs to be formed. It may be called 'Social Medicine and Community Health Network', and should have representation of alumni, faculties and students. It may be linked to AAJ as one of their Centre-wise Chapters, provided its autonomy is safeguarded. This association should have a life-time membership fee. Interest earned from the corpus so generated may be used to help students from economical weaker sections.
- A website and a mobile application may be designed to maintain updated database of alumni and students. Such interfaces will help in identifying the need and the source of support. These interfaces may also be used for on-line discussions, which may feed in critical Public Health advocacy and activism. The interfaces may as well be used for sharing information about conferences, scholarships, internships and work opportunities.
- In order to keep the alumni connected:
 - Annual Meet: this may be clubbed with the proposed Young Scholar's Conference.
 - Quarterly News letter: this may contain updates on activities undertaken by the students, the faculty and the alumni, at the Centre or in field.
 - Networking dinners: with or without a preceding discussion on a niche theme.
- In order to utilize their diverse expertise, alumni may be invited to:
 - Engage with the planning of the vision, the mission and the editorial policy of the proposed biannual e-journal (ensuring that it's not 'yet another journal'), and to join its editorial board. Prof. Mohan Rao offered to be on the Advisory Board of the proposed journal.
 - Help with the conceptualization and planning of proposed annual Young Scholar's Conference (ensuring that it's not 'yet another conference', and that its funding is only from acceptable sources), and to join its selection committee.
 - Deliver lecture(s), or conduct skill building workshops under the monthly Student Lecture Series. Alumni can do this either by physically visiting the Centre, or through IT tools like Skype. These lectures may be live-streamed using easily accesible applications like Facebook Live.
- Other ways in which Alumni and students may mutually benefit:
 - In case some alumnus is organizing a conference or a workshop, s/he may ask for organizing support from the students.
 - If some alumnus is working in field-level organization, s/he may host the second semester's long-field work. In-general, internships may be offered during the vacations.

Alumni Working Group (2018):

S.No.	Category	Name	e-mail
1	Alumnus	Abhijit Nandi	abhijit70@gmail.com
2	Alumnus	Indira Chakravarthi	indira.jnu@gmail.com
3	Alumnus	Hiranya Kumar Das	drhkd66@hotmail.com
4	Alumnus	Nitu Singh	nitunitusingh@gmail.com
5	Alumnus	Indranil Mukhopadayay	indranil.jnu@gmail.com
6	Alumnus	Ashwini Sopanrao Jadhav	ashwinij158@gmail.com
7	Faculty	Nemthianngai Guite	guitemahal@gmail.com
8	Faculty	Ghodajkar Prachinkumar Rajeshrao	prachinjnu@gmail.com
9	Student	Talienla Imchen	talienlaimchen@gmail.com
10	Student	Sayan Das	drsayandash@gmail.com

Links:

- Enhanced Web Page: <https://www.jnu.ac.in/sss/csmch>
- Photos of the meet: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/162417198@N08/collections>
- Short Documentary Film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7ksTF0i4Es>

Statement of Income and Expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Source	Amount (Rs.)	Item	Amount (Rs.)
Contribution from Alumni (@ Rs. 500 per head; Rs. 250 per additional member)	38250	Food (Including water and Cleaning charges)	41300
Contribution from Faculty (@ Rs. 1000 per head)	10000	Venue	6250
Contribution from Students (@ Rs. 250 per head)	17750	Photo-frames	8500
		Stationary	5360
		Miscellaneous	928
		Hand-over to Alumni Working Group	3662
Total	66000	Total	66000

Organizing Team for the First Alumni Meet

Chairperson, CSMCH	Prof. Ramila Bisht
Alumni Organizing Committee (AOC)	Dr. Indranil (Alumni), Dr. Prachin (Faculty), Aien, Shikha, Navneet, Krishna, Mohit
Posters & Banners	Sayan, Ritika, Vyom, Sangli, Sreekumar, Ruma, Indranil, Asrar
Registration Desk	Navneet, Shikha, Aien, Shilpi, Ujjayinee, Sarita
Food Arrangements	Krishna, Amrendra, Priyanka, Sreekumar, Chandan
Anchoring	Pratyush
Rapporteur	Kanika, Amod, Vyom, Rahul, Monica, Mohit
Photo/Video	Sayan, Asrar, Sangli, Ramanand, Vysakh Navneet
Student Faculty Committee (SFC)	Sarita, Monica, Sayan, Krishna, Mohit

HOPE TO SEE YOU ALL AGAIN

