

# Fulfilling an Election Promise

by Janet Jagan

More often than not, we fail to recognize and appreciate what we have. I often wonder how many Guyanese recognize the extent of our health care system and not only that, but the quality of our service. One of the most basic of our health services and the foundation of good health in adults is our immunization programme which covers over 90% of Guyana's children. The Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) provides coverage against tuberculosis, yellow fever, hepatitis B, influenza Type B, diphtheria, measles, mumps and rubella.

This is one of the reasons for the reduction in infant and child deaths. Guyana has received several international awards for its expert immunization programme and also, for its border surveillance, i.e., preventing these diseases from passing through our borders. Guyana's immunization programme recently won a Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) award for its work in this

field. I can remember when, as First Lady, I attended a conference of hemispheric First Ladies in Paraguay and was present when the First Lady of Paraguay initiated the country's first immunization programme for

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cannot afford adequate health care and have to go without medicine, eye glasses or dental treatment. A federal report showed that in 2005, more than 40 million adults did not receive "needed services" because

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its children. By that time, Guyana's immunization programme for children was in full swing.

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One of the major issues in the US presidential election campaign was the American health care system. The then presidential candidate Barack Obama gave as one of his election promises the provision of health care to the American people who have no access to such care.

According to statistics, more than 40 million Americans say they

they could not afford them. Nearly 15 million adults could not obtain eyeglasses, 25 million did not get dental care, 19 million did not get needed prescribed medicine and 15 million did not get needed medical care due to cost. Elderly Americans, who could not afford medications prescribed to them, have resorted to traveling over the border to Canada to purchase drugs that will



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cheaper there.

Guyana's health programme is directed to the decentralization of the system. To this end, rural hospitals and health centres are being established to reduce traveling expenses to patients, to provide better quality and more services available to match local needs and to achieve more involvement of the community in the management and delivery of health care services.

A good example of this is the recently built Diamond Diagnostic Centre which from October 2007 to October 2008 treated some 75,000 persons. The Centre boasts a diagnostic area equipped with X-ray,

ultrasound and endoscopy equipment, a clinical laboratory, an ophthalmology unit, a dental clinic and an accident and emergency services as well as an intensive care unit. The intensive care facility has already treated 366 patients and greatly reduced the pressures on the Georgetown Hospital.

The Health Ministry has also announced that some 700 students are receiving medical training in Cuba. Also, the training of nurses and medics has been stepped up to meet the growing needs.

We have a lot to boast about when it comes to the dramatic advances made since the PPP/C came into office in 1992. Richer countries than ours cannot match some of our advances in providing health care to the Guyanese people. It is one of the several election promises made and no one can deny its fulfillment. And yet, there are many more advances in health care that will be developing in the future.