

# Awareness drive on small screen

## OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

*Several people say on camera that they frequent a brothel, but are not aware of the dangers of any disease. More than 85 per cent of truck drivers have never heard of HIV. Those who have heard know it is a virus that can jump 80 ft and infect a person.*

These are the findings of the city's first e-NGO, Sukriti Foundation. Members of the organisation — doctors, scientists, bureaucrats and authors — have come together to use television for spreading awareness.

Sukriti Foundation produces live and interactive programmes on AIDS awareness, use and misuse of blood, thalassaemia, mental health and hygiene, child psychology and parental guidance.

The NGO has roped in Association of Health Service Doctors, one of the largest representative bodies of doctors, for advice on healthcare problems.

"The government launched the thalassaemia prevention drive after a programme on the disease, made by Sukriti Foundation, was aired. In the programme, we had requested the government to ask all blood banks to remain open for 24 hours. Following the airing of the programme, 50 per cent of the blood banks are staying open for 24 hours," said Apurba Ghosh, secretary-general, West Bengal Voluntary Blood Donors Forum.

"Such awareness-building exercises will go a long way in creating a better health environment here," he added.

The foundation's work will primarily be in the field of health communication and education, said cardiac surgeon Kunal Sarkar, a member.

He stressed the need for an open forum that would work as a grievance cell. "We will soon have a platform where patients and their families can voice their opinion on medical services. By offering constructive criticism, the forum could act as a bridge between doctors and patients," he explained.

One of the brains behind the project, Bhaskar Ghose, retired Doordarshan director-general and information and broadcasting secretary, asserted that Sukriti Foundation was different from other NGOs.

Quoting a recent survey, he said that about 59 per cent of television viewers are not working and 22 per cent are unskilled workers.

"This 81 per cent (59+22) of the viewers would benefit from the works of Sukriti Foundation as awareness among them is the least. Everybody should use television more often to reach out to their target audience in the most cost-effective way," Ghose said.

"Visual language is the best way of communicating with the less-privileged," said Abhijit Dasgupta, who directs television programmes and is a member of the NGO.