

## **The Man Who Saved Millions**

### **- Dr Dilip Mahalanabis & The Story of ORS**

With the usual increase in cases of acute gastroenteritis during the summer months, I found myself thinking about Oral Rehydration Solution (ORS). We prescribe it almost every day, and it remains the first-line treatment for dehydration caused by diarrhoea.

What surprised me was learning the story behind how ORS became so widely used.

During the 1971 Bangladesh refugee crisis, cholera spread rapidly through overcrowded camps. Intravenous fluids were in short supply, and thousands of people needed treatment. Dr. Dilip Mahalanabis, an Indian paediatrician, showed that a simple solution of water, glucose and electrolytes could be safely given by families themselves.

His team distributed ORS widely, even where medical care was limited. The impact was remarkable, reducing the case fatality rate from cholera from around 30% to 3.6%.

What started as a practical solution during a humanitarian crisis went on to change the way the world treats diarrhoeal dehydration. Since then, ORS has been credited with saving an estimated 54 million lives, most of them children.

Today, ORS is available in almost every clinic and pharmacy, yet few of us know the story behind it.

As doctors, we often look for the next breakthrough in medicine. This is a reminder that sometimes the greatest advances are not the most sophisticated—they are the ones that are simple, affordable and available to everyone.

Dr. Mahalanabis showed the world how ORS could save lives on a massive scale. That may be one of the greatest medical contributions of our time!

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