

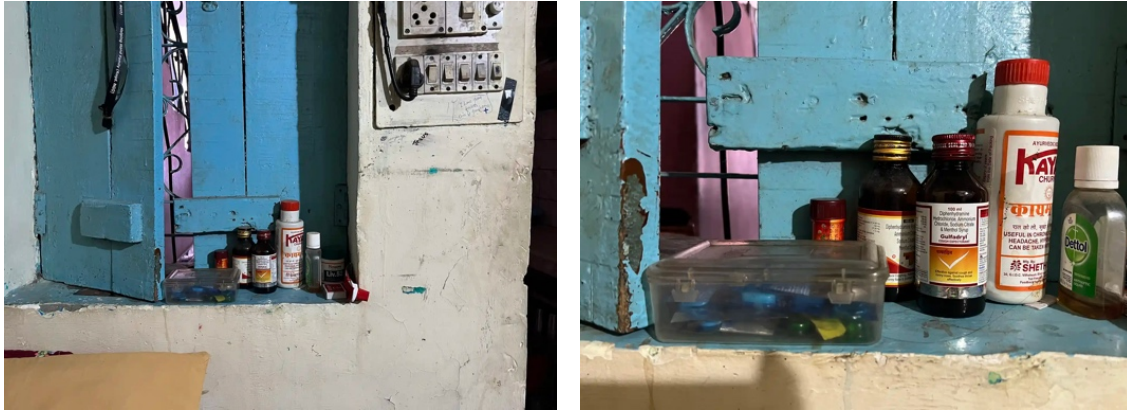
Inside homes: Medicine Box

Where should we keep medicines in our home? Do we put them in a plastic bag and hang it from a peg or just spread them out here and there and everywhere? Or do we organise them in a box and place them strategically in the correct corner. Come let us explore stories of where and how we place these silver-encased red, yellow and white pills in our homes and in our lives?

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The Blue Window



Kalpna told her mother that she had purposefully kept all Papa's medicines on the window sill. Mummy is still lying around in Papa's bed. All his medicines and most importantly the bottle of powder for Papa's belly gas, have been organised with great care on the window sill. The window sill, just a few feet away from the bed, is straight in the line of vision. As soon as Papa opens his eyes in the morning, along with the first golden rays of the sun, he would be able to see all his medicines arrayed beautifully in front of him. I even begged my brother to paint the window a bright blue, so that Papa's eyes are drawn straight towards it. In the night when Papa lies down on his bed after a hard day's work, then again, his eyes will rest on his medicines. I have made a silent, but attractive reminder, so that Papa never forgets his medicines. Mamma though sometimes cribs a little about it. This is the only little window of our home and when she cooks in the other corner of the room, it often fills up with smoke and gets stuffy. So for mummy, I have organised things in a way so that one half of the window can be opened. This way both Papa and mummy are happy!

The Decorated shelf



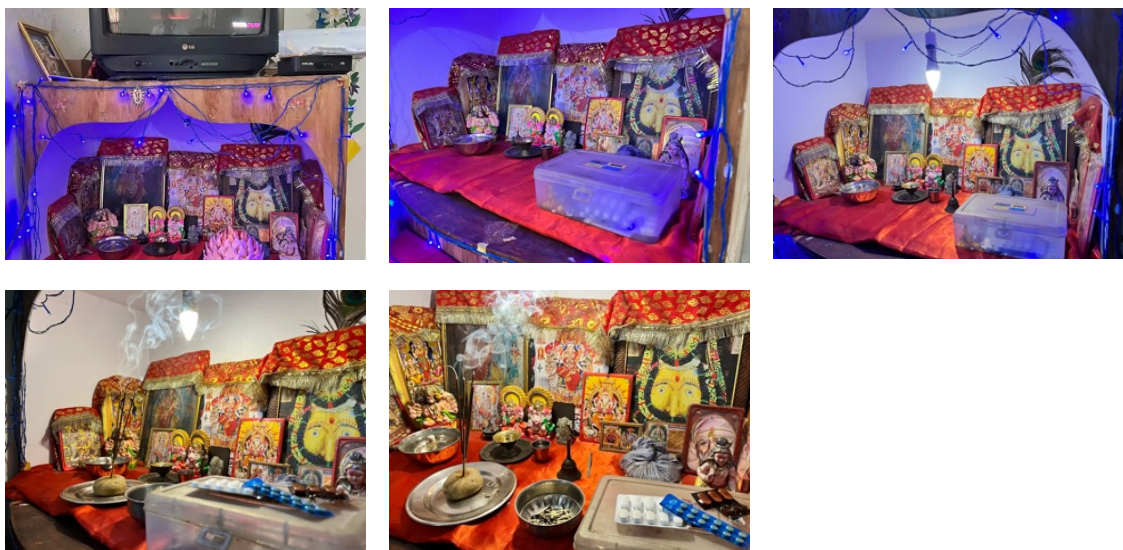
A few days ago, Puja got a sheet of paper with colourful flowers to decorate this shelf. The reason for decorating this shelf was to finally put it to use. It was no longer just an ordinary corner of her house. The cups kept away in the kitchen for special guests, had been neatly arranged to create a focal point for visitors. Surrounding this little tower of cups were Puja's little son, Shivam's medicine bottles and powders. Puja has also collected all the adhar cards of her family members, which were otherwise strewn around the house and neatly pressed them under a glass sheet. Spare change, colourful plastic birds, yellow roses, a mirror, makeup and Puja's purse had all been kept neatly on the shelf. It was as if Puja had built an alter for the bond between a mother and her new born son.

A Rack full of Medicines



The medicines also have their very own requirements! Some have to be taken on an empty stomach and some after food. The prescription also seems to be getting lost constantly. Soniya has made the prescription six times already. She has got the prescription made and then lost them herself, by mistake. She has spent thirty Rupees to get these prescriptions. Nowadays they charge five rupees at the dispensary for a prescription. After losing 5 prescriptions, Soniya bought this cheap plastic rack from the Friday market. Now Raunak's daily medicines and prescriptions have all been kept in one place on this rack. Usually, children have the ability to turn almost everything into a plaything. But for Raunak, the plastic medicine bottle is his special toy. He loves banging the bottle on the ground and claps his hands in delight. Only he knows, if he really enjoys this or if he takes out his anger on the bottle of medicine by banging it. The medicines have now been kept securely on the rack, far from the eyes of naughty Raunak.

Medicines in a Temple



The temple is on the right side to the entrance of the house. On top of the temple stands an old television which has long stopped working. Strips of medicines peek out from the medicine box lying on top of the TV. Ria's mother often forgets the names of all the medicines but always remembers what ailments they are for. So, they can't afford to misplace any of the strips. That is why they have been kept with such care on top of the temple. Medicines become more effective when accompanied with prayers. The smell of medicines often floats through their home which lacks ventilation and open windows. Ria's family is now used to this smell, but visitors often say how their home has become a hospital.

These medicines belong to Ria and many of them are for the rise and fall of her temperature. Usually, she doesn't always get a fever but with the changing weather, it often takes hold of her. The first aid box is specially for her and is filled with different medicines and vitamins.

When she began falling ill, they would take Riya to the local *jhola chhap*¹ doctor (quack) in their neighbourhood. But now they visit the local mohalla clinic² and get medicines from there. Once the medicines are over, they visit the clinic with an empty strip for a renewal.

Morning and evening, Reema, Riya's mother, would sit down for her prayers. Along with the tinkling of her prayer bells, she would remember that she had to give medicines to Riya.

¹ The term *jhola chhap* doctor is used to describe the '*jhola*' or bag of remedies that give '*chhap*' or unofficial licence to be considered a medical professional in the eyes of the people he treats.

² Aam Aadmi Mohalla Clinics (AAMC), also known as Mohalla Clinics, are primary health centres in the union territory of Delhi and state of Punjab in India.

Granny's medicines atop the TV



My grandmother loves the feel of a cool breeze. That is why she has selected the room on the roof for herself. Her room is small and made with tin sheets. She has a small bed along with a big, old-style TV and a water-based air cooler. Her room doesn't have a door and is open from one side.

Granny lives alone in that room. The rest of the family lives in the room downstairs. Mehak, her granddaughter is responsible for caring for her. Mehak brings all her meals, gives her medicines on time and looks after her. However, from seven to twelve during the day she is in school. So, she has kept all of Granny's medicines near the TV so that she doesn't miss any during Mehak's school hours.

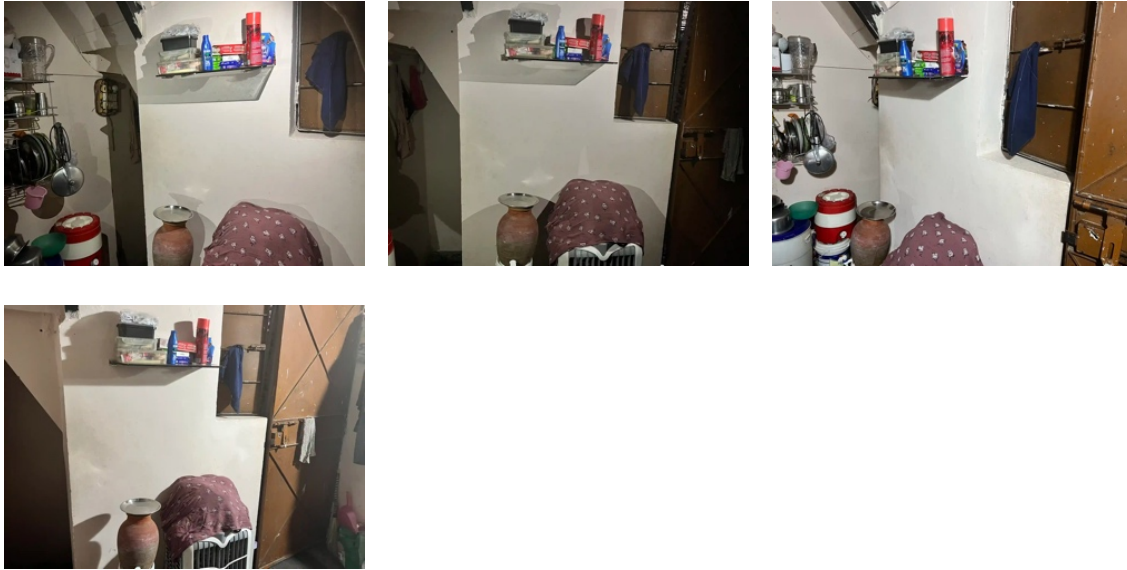
Whenever someone climbs up the stairs, they are first drawn to the big TV in the room. Granny also loves watching TV and her bed is also kept right in front of it. It's acts as a good reminder for her and all the rest in the house. That is why Mehak has organized all Granny's medicines in front of the TV.

Granny gets all her medicines from the mohalla clinic³. Not just Granny, but all other older women in her lane go to the clinic together and get their medicines and meet the doctor. Granny doesn't even know how to pronounce the word, 'mohalla clinic.' She calls it "topiwala clinic⁴."

³ Aam Aadmi Mohalla Clinics (AAMC), also known as Mohalla Clinics, are primary health centres in the union territory of Delhi and state of Punjab in India.

⁴ Topiwala clinic refers to the Mohalla clinics or primary health centers set up by the Aam Admi Party (AAP) which came into power in the state government of Delhi in 2013. Arvind Kejriwal is the national convener of AAP and is the chief minister of Delhi from 2013- 2014 and since 2015. Kejriwal is known to wear a white cotton *topi* (cap) and is often fondly referred to as '*topiwala*' (the one with the cap).

Medicines next to the waterpot

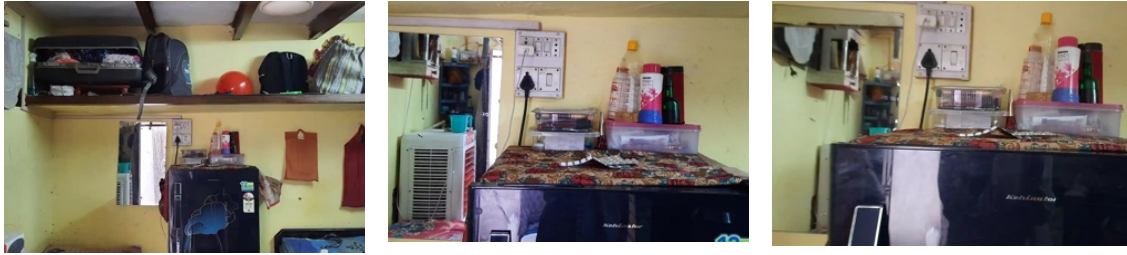


A small six by six feet home in Sanjay camp. The square window is built as if it was stuck to the door. Sunlight enters through this window into the home and declares the beginning of a new day. From morning to afternoon, this home doesn't need any other light. The room seems quite bare, but all the surrounding curtains seem to hide a world behind them. Rukaiyya has pushed and cajoled her husband Aslam, to build a glass shelf under the window. She keeps many little household tidbits on it. The smell of medicines envelope the whole room. As if someone has spread a unique fragrance in it.

The shelf has been built high up in the wall, away from the reach of the children. Rukaiyya has kept some of her child's medicines on this glass shelf. She is scared that her children might gulp down the bottle of medical syrup mistaking it for Pepsi. Medicines, she feels, should remain in front of her eyes so that they can be had on time, rather than being hidden behind curtains. That is why Rukaiyya has kept them on this glass shelf.

There are three plastic boxes filled with medicines, out of which many have expired and lie nestled with empty strips of pills. The box of new medicines is kept separately. Most of these medicines are for Aslam. Aslam has been diagnosed with Asthma for these past two years. Since he has started taking his medicines, his breathing sounds less like a whistle. Now Aslam has become used to taking his medicines. When he reaches out for the medicines, he may find water with ease or along with the water, he may find his medicines. That is why Rukaiyya has kept the waterpot strategically below the shelf. Since then, Aslam has started taking his medicines himself, without prompting from Rukaiyya. Whenever Aslam pops out a pill from its strip, it sounds like a peanut being cracked open from its shell. Everyone at home gets to know by that sound that Aslam has taken his medicines.

Medicines on the Fridge



Ravinder was scheduled to have a surgery by the end of June. However, it had to be postponed because he came down with Jaundice. The surgery was for hernia which has been troubling him a lot. He has to be careful now as he can't carry weight, isn't able to stand for long and has to take his meals on time.

Aah.. Ma... he was lying in bed, exhausted! He hasn't gone to work today and has been in pain since morning.

He took out two pills, 'chit chit' from the strip of medicines and 'gat gat' gulped them down with water.

There are many other things kept on top of the refrigerator. They are kept there so they are in easy reach. As soon as he came into the house, he would keep his wallet there as well. His cellphone along with his wife's makeup and beauty stuff would also be kept there. There are no cupboards or shelves in the house, other than this fridge top. There are two beds on two sides of the house. One big and one small. A stone slab has been built to create a kitchen.

"Are you feeling, okay?" wife asked.

"Yes. Let me rest for a while." Ah... Ma... he held onto his ribs while lying down.

He has been getting treated at Lal Bahadur Shastri hospital for a year now. He has never been to a private doctor or got any of alternative medicine.

"Please get me some water," said Ravinder and sat up on bed. It was almost eight in the evening. The fluorescent tube was spreading light in the room.

"Your medicines are almost over. You will have to get some tomorrow," Ravinder's wife said.

On top of the fridge there is a file with all the documents from Lal Bahadur Shastri hospital. Every week his prescription has to be renewed. On the way back from work, one of Ravinder's jobs is to stand in the long queue and get his medicines.

Light On Illnes Off



The door stands alert in a dusty, paint flecked room. Abba had built that door himself. He is a carpenter. He is being treated for Tuberculosis. He has hung all his medicines in an empty packet of chillies which now hang from a nail on the wall. While in the room, he is constantly reminded to take his medicines. Once Abba's eyes began burning. She had forgotten to wash her hands after giving him his medicines. She had got some medicines from the mohalla clinic⁵, some from a nearby doctor's clinic and some more when she visited a hospital with Abba. Every morning she would switch on the light and give Abba his medicines and then again she would give him the night's dose while switching off the light. Switching on and off the light bulb had become a part of the medical routine of Abba. Sometimes when there was no electricity, then I would have difficulty in giving Abba his medicines.

⁵ Aam Aadmi Mohalla Clinics (AAMC), also known as Mohalla Clinics, are primary health centres in the union territory of Delhi and state of Punjab in India.

The Plastic Garland



Anand had got a garland to decorate his mother, Saroopi's picture. Even though it was a garland of plastic beads, yet his emotions were deeply connected to it. Even until a month ago, these medicines were so critical and were used from morning until night. Today they have been relegated to a corner. First covid and then a bout of asthma had trapped Saroopi, inside her home. Many doctors and different treatments were used. But everything failed. A week ago, she breathed her last. On the shelf, which was otherwise a place for colourful strips of pills, bottles of syrup and packets of tablets, there now stood a picture of Saroopi. While the medicines and all other paraphernalia were still there, the one who used them was no more. Until a couple of months ago, these medicines supported a life, but today they stand helpless and silent in one corner of the shelf.

Medicines in the Corner

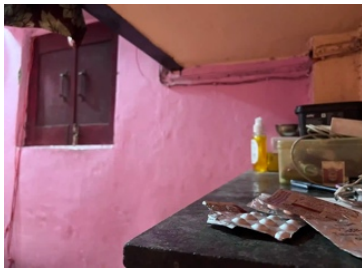


Ana is a homely woman. Her husband is a peon⁶. He has to often be outside the home. However, he gives her money for the household expenses on time. Their son Sadik, has difficulty walking. He is still so young, but Ana constantly worries how he will manage once he grows up. That is why Ana has pledged to get her son treated under any circumstances. Sadik could not walk but he was an artist.

Ana had been taking Sadik to the government hospital for treatment for the past two years. She would give him his medicine on time and with a lot of care. She had designated a corner of a wooden shelf specially for his medicines. Ana and Sadik lived in a small room which had a window through which they would get a fresh breeze. Sadik had become so used to his medicines, that he could recognise them just from their fragrance. He would not go to sleep without taking his medicines. In spite of taking so many medicines, Sadik's limbs were lifeless. He would watch TV at night to keep himself tension free. Between the TV and painting, Sadik would manage to keep his mind occupied and would sleep soundly at night. Ana would twist and turn all night and wonder if there was any medicine which would take away her worries and give her a night of peaceful rest.

⁶ someone whose job is to work in an office doing jobs that do not need any particular skill.

Medicine Strips on a Shelf



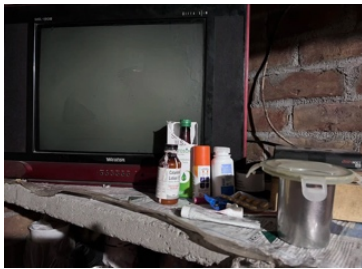
Twelve-year-old Harshit's school holidays have started. His class nine examinations are over now. As he grows older, he has become a responsible son of the family. After both his parents leave for work, he finishes the small household chores left by them. While chatting, he begins collecting the medicine strips spread out on the shelf. There are many things on the shelf- mummy's glass bangles which match the colour of her clothes, the needlework box which she uses while repairing the torn clothes of her family, Papa's phone cover and his water glass along with all his medicines.

Look! How papa has spread out all his medicines on the shelf. He showed the mess with his hands. Papa removed the medicines from their wrapper in such a way, that its smell would not spread through the room. He would say that the medicines smell like rusting iron.

The smell tends travels from the nose into the mouth. We would try and quickly wrap it in a plastic packet before it spread. The smell is so strong that it can make anyone throw up. Papa isn't able to stand this smell even though he has been taking this medication for many years now. He has some problems in his brain. He sometimes faints while standing. The doctor had said that he had brain fever. Some days he would start speaking like a child while on others, he would behave like an old man. The treatment has slowly started showing a positive impact and Papa has been feeling better.

But all these medicines make him uneasy and nauseous. We would have to switch on the fan even in winters and in summers, we ran the air cooler to drive away the smell of the medicines. Papa would find it difficult to swallow his medicines and would contort his face while taking them. Earlier, Mummy would be in tears seeing Papa like this, but now she feels relieved that he is getting better.

The Dwindling Medicines



Ever since the television stopped working, Neetu had begun taking her medicines on time. Earlier she would be so lost in watching TV that she would always bungle up the timings. A sheet has been spread on an old trunk and the TV has been kept on it alongside all the medicines. They don't belong to any single person in the family though. They have been collected from various medical stores and the local dispensary with great care. They are being collected for a rainy day. A glass of water is also kept strategically, covered with the lid of a lost tiffin box. Just behind the TV, is a switchboard to which a network of connections are fitted. This corner had been identified as the medicine corner of the house. Neetu would leave early for work and come back late. It was this hectic schedule which had made her anaemic and weak. Every evening, she would look at the dwindling medicines and feel that perhaps that was an indication that she was getting better.