

EDITORIAL

FAILURE OF HEALTH CARE DELIVERY SYSTEM OF PAKISTAN

Health care system plays an important role in the economic development of any country. Healthy labor force leads to economic growth and human welfare of a country. Pakistan being developing country has always faced problems in its health care delivery system.

Only 27% of Pakistani population receives full health care coverage while 73% of the population depends upon 'Fee for Service'¹. Health profile of any country is judged by various health indicators such as death rate, maternal and infant mortality rate. Unfortunately Pakistan stands among those countries which have high maternal mortality, high infant & child mortality, high population growth rate and double burden of communicable and non communicable diseases².

According to World Bank Data 2014, Pakistan public sector health expenditure is 0.919% of GDP³. Constitution of Pakistan makes provincial governments responsible for 'Provision of Health' except in Federally Administered Areas (FATA). Health care delivery system of Pakistan is 'Three-Tiered'. Basic Health Units (BHUs) & Rural Health Centers (RHCs) form core of primary health care structure. Tehsil Head Quarters (THQs) & District Head Quarters (DHQs) for secondary care including first and second referral facilities which are further supported by 'Tertiary Care' from Teaching Hospitals⁴. Most of the people receive healthcare through private out of pocket payments made directly to the health care providers. Taxation and out of pocket payments are therefore, the major modes of financing health within the country and donor contribution adds to these 4.

Lack of well organized healthcare delivery system in Pakistan creates a unique situation. There is lack of clear sustainable vision for human resource development in healthcare sector and federal MoH (Ministry of Health) does not have a unit for such an important health system function. There is a shortage doctors, nurses, paramedics and outreach staff like Lady Health Worker (LHWs) and health administrators and managers at all levels⁵. Due to absence of well defined policy on human resource development, lack of formal in service training, migration of skilled healthcare worker to other countries (due to better economic incentives) has created many challenges for healthcare system of Pakistan.

Government is investing its limited resources in development of medical colleges and universities rather than investing in improving the quality of health care by training medical professional by introducing public health schools and paramedical institutions. Decision related to budget and allocation of resources is implemented by federal government. This misunderstanding between federal and provincial governments creates chaos for healthcare system of Pakistan.

Challenges to Pakistani healthcare system are many folds; however, it can be rectified by adopting simple, systematic and sustainable health policy and procedures. Access of people to available health services should be increased. The country is spending 0.5 to 0.91 percent of its GDP on health over the last 10 years. These percentages are less than the WHO bench mark of at least 6 percent of GDP required to provide basic and life saving services⁶.

Awareness programs related to health issues should be conducted in rural areas and "Preventive Model of Health" should be adopted to achieve success in health sector with minimal affordable budget.

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