

Role of the Government in Health



Healthcare is an aspect that has been neglected in India. It needs to be taken up on a war-footing.

The Constitution of India advocates that “the state shall endeavour to raise the level of nutrition and standard of living and to improve public health”, but it is hardly available to the poor. The section discusses how the disadvantaged faces immense problems in keeping good health. Every citizen has a right to the basic amenities needed to keep good health. Good health comprises physical, mental and spiritual well-being.

The government has taken stringent steps through various public awareness programmes to help keep surroundings clean. The Union Government launched the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan on October 2, 2014. What is needed is to persuade the public to keep their surroundings clean and free from mosquitoes and flies, because they spread diseases. We should not let water collect around our house. Use of boiled and filtered water is necessary. Individual cleanliness is very important.

WHAT IS HEALTH?

Health is directly associated with physical well-being, remaining free from illness and thereby not having to visit a doctor.



What do you think will happen in these two cases shown above?

Disease or illness or an accident is not the only thing that could affect our body. We could be prone to illness if we do not get enough food. Cramped and unventilated living conditions may also be a reason to fall ill. Mental and physical strain can also cause grave illness. So we should all strive to remain in good health by practising clean habits.

HEALTHCARE IN INDIA

Healthcare conditions in India are very poor. Let us discuss some facts.

- In spite of India being one of the poorer countries of the world, it has the largest number of hospitals and medical colleges in the world.
- India produces almost 15,000 doctors every year.

- People in India have ill health because the majority of its population living in the rural areas does not have access to good hospitals and well-qualified doctors.
- Most medical practitioners want to practise in big cities where they have better and bigger opportunities.
- Villagers often have to travel miles before they can get medical treatment.
- A report says that there were 11,174 hospitals functioning in 1991. The number grew to 18218 in 2000 and has increased to an even larger number since then.
- Though India has a large number of hospitals, as many as five lakh people die of tuberculosis (TB) every year. This number has not changed since Independence.
- Almost two million cases of malaria are registered every year. There is no sign of decrease in the number.
- India is the fourth largest producer of medicines in the world. A large quantity of medicines is even exported to different parts of the world.
- It is said that we are not able to provide clean drinking water to all. It may be noted that 21 per cent of all communicable diseases like diarrhoea, typhoid, hepatitis, etc. are water-borne diseases and spread due to contamination of water.

India gets a large number of medical tourists every year. Many patients from Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and other Asian countries visit India for treatment in hospitals that offer world-class facilities at lower costs.

- Many patients travel to India from neighbouring countries for medical treatment. This is called **medical tourism**.

Looking at the fact that there are so many hospitals and phenomenal medical advancement, it is not true that the government is not able to provide good health services. If people from foreign lands can get themselves treated in the best of hospitals here, why can't the government make available the same facilities to its own people cheaply?

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE HEALTHCARE SERVICES

Health services are broadly divided into two categories :

- (i) People having low income go to the public or government hospitals and dispensaries.
- (ii) Those with better means visit private hospitals and nursing homes where they get good facilities. **A majority of people in India cannot really afford the high expenses of private nursing homes and health clinics.**

Let us read the story of Hakim Sheik who was a member of the Paschim Banga Khet Mazdoor Samiti (PBKMS). It is an organisation of agricultural labourers in West Bengal. One day, in the year 1992, he accidentally fell off a running train and suffered massive injuries.

He was rushed to a government hospital in Kolkata but was refused admission and treatment because of non-availability of a bed. The next hospital did not have specialised doctors to treat him, so they also did not admit him. From one government hospital to another, he went in search of one that would admit him. After some 14 hours



A public hospital – All India Institute of Medical Sciences



A private hospital

of running around he could get medical treatment in a private hospital. This private hospital charged him heavily for his treatment.

Hakim Sheik was so upset and angry that he filed a case in the court. He was right in his action. **It is our basic right to get proper and timely treatment at government hospitals.** It is the government's responsibility to safeguard the Right to Life of every individual. Therefore, in the case of Hakim Sheik, **the court directed the State Government to reimburse the amount of money Hakim Sheik spent on his treatment at the private hospital.**

Let us study the case of two friends, Anmol and Madan. Anmol's parents were poor while Madan belonged to a well-to-do family. It so happened that both fell ill due to viral fever simultaneously.

Madan was taken to a big private hospital which had modern facilities. His father had to pay ₹ 500/- at the reception before the doctor examined Madan. The hospital was well managed and the hospital staff was very caring. The doctor said that Madan would have to undergo certain tests. So he was taken to the laboratory where a lady took his blood sample. She was very efficient. The results came the next day. The doctor prescribed some expensive medicines and asked him to take rest. There was no need to worry.

On the other hand, Anmol's experience of a hospital was not at all pleasant.

After much debate Anmol's father took him to a government hospital. As his father had anticipated, they had to wait in a long queue in front of the O.P.D. counter before their turn came. The long wait made Anmol sick and weaker. As the doctor had been examining too many patients, he was in a bad mood. He sent Anmol to get some tests done. Again they had to stand in a long queue for the tests. The test results came after **eight** days. Again a visit to the O.P.D., only this time they found another doctor. He prescribed some fever-reducing pills.

// ACTIVITY

Visit a Public Health Centre of your locality. Prepare a note about the facilities, the efficiency of staff, care shown to the patients and any other detail.

He was advised not to worry, because it was just viral fever. The doctor sounded irritated and tired when he was asked questions.

- Why did Madan's father have to spend so much money on his treatment?
- What problems did Anmol face in the government hospital?
- Who got faster and better treatment – Madan or Anmol?

Both Anmol and Madan had viral fever which was cured by taking fever reducing pills, but only at different costs. While Madan's father had to spend ₹ 3500/-, it cost Anmol's father only ₹ 150/-.

The public health service is a government undertaking which provides medical treatment both in rural as well as urban areas. In villages, it maintains health centres, run by a nurse and a village health worker. The health centres work



Long wait in the O.P.D. of a government hospital



A mobile clinic provides quick healthcare service to the poor.

under the supervision of Public Health Centre (PHC) doctors. It covers many villages together. Next is a district hospital at the district level. In cities, there are many government hospitals. Public hospitals provide service to all either free or at a low cost. The money to run public hospitals comes from us, the public, to provide quality healthcare services to all. Besides treating the general public, these hospitals also take up the task of prevention of spread of diseases like T.B., jaundice, malaria, cholera, etc. Public hospitals also take up campaigns with public participation in eradication of mosquito breeding, polio prevention, etc.

It is our basic right to get proper and timely treatment at government hospitals.

PRIVATE HEALTH FACILITIES

As the name suggests, private hospitals are not funded by the government. They are totally owned by private individuals or companies. They provide specialised testing services like ultrasound, x-rays, endoscopy, etc. Many of them employ highly qualified and experienced doctors who perform complex operations. They are many of them in big cities, where they make enormous profits. They also maintain their own medicine outlets within the hospitals. As we have seen, the treatment is fast. The treatment is fast because they are equipped with modern facilities.

As cities provide better opportunities to doctors in terms of earning and facilities, most of them set up clinics there. Rural areas lag behind due to obvious reasons.

INFOBITS

- ▶ India became polio free in January 2014.
- ▶ Tobacco related deaths in India amount to 8-900000 per year, leading to huge social and economic losses.
- ▶ The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare plays a key role in guiding India's public health system.
- ▶ Safe drinking water and sanitation are key factors for a good public health system as they reduce the spread of communicable diseases.

DID YOU KNOW?

According to the UNICEF, more than two million children die every year in our country from preventable infections.

HEALTHCARE AND EQUALITY

With the increase of private participation in healthcare, more and more doctors are taking up jobs in private hospitals, where they get much higher salaries as compared to government hospitals.

As private hospitals have to make profits to keep up a good reputation, these doctors prescribe many unnecessary and expensive medicines. Poor people who go for treatment in these hospitals often land up in huge debts. Many have to sell their belongings to pay up the nursing bills. As the poor do not get the basic necessities like safe drinking water, adequate housing and clean surroundings, they are more prone to illness. The costly medical treatment, on top of it all, makes their life miserable.



Fruits are essential for health but the poor cannot afford it.

Lack of money is not always the reason for not getting proper and timely treatment. Women are considered less important than men, so their health is not normally attended to promptly.

All said and done, an illness in any family, rich or poor, is a cause of anxiety.

What can be Done?

The healthcare situation of the majority of Indians is not very good. The government is responsible for providing good healthcare service to all, specially to the poor. As health is

dependent on basic amenities (i.e., proper diet, clean environment, etc) and good socio-economic conditions, it is important to work on both issues.



Anganwadi workers and helpers are the grassroot functionaries at village level for delivery of services under Central and State Government schemes. They also impart training to rural women and take care of children. The union government has recently taken several steps to revamp the Anganwadi scheme.

THE KERALA EXPERIENCE

In order to improve the healthcare facilities in Kerala, a programme was undertaken by the State Government in which 40 per cent of the state fund was given to the Panchayat, in the year 1996.

The Panchayat was given funds to provide

better facilities to the villagers. Food was made available to all the poor villagers. Women upliftment programmes were organised to help them become independent and earn a living. Education was provided to the children. Anganwadis or children centres were launched.

It resulted in a huge success and the situation in the villages improved. One could see that the supply of clean and pure water was regular. Health centres started functioning properly. Schools enrolled more students. Still some other problems arose like shortage of medicines and doctors; not enough beds were available in hospitals.

THE COSTA RICAN APPROACH

The healthiest of all countries of Latin America is Costa Rica. It was decided in the country's Constitution not to have an army. It is a known fact that a government has to spend a lot of money on the maintenance of an army. So it decided to spend the amount that would be spent on the army, on the needs of public health and basic needs of the people of Costa Rica.

So the government of Costa Rica provides potable water and looks after sanitation and nutrition of people. It also provides housing facilities. The government spends much on public healthcare and education.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Health means our ability to remain free of illness and injuries.
- India has considerable experience and knowledge in running a public healthcare system. There is a chain of hospitals and health centres run by the government.
- There is a wide range of private health facilities in our country. There are big hospitals in cities run by corporate houses. A large number of doctors run their own private clinics. In villages, there are Registered Medical Practitioners.
- The cost of private healthcare service is very high and the poor are unable to afford it. They have to go to a government hospital. Public health services are limited. Private health services are concentrated in cities and towns.
- Health conditions throughout our country are not good. It is the responsibility of the government to provide quality healthcare services to all its citizens.
- In 1996, the Kerala government allotted forty per cent of the entire state budget to panchayats. They spent the money on basic facilities like health. Huge success was noticed.
- Costa Rican government does not have armed forces. It spends the money on education, health and other services. So it is the healthiest country in Latin America.

GLOSSARY

- COMMUNICABLE** : Diseases which spread fast from person to person through contact, food, air and water.
- DISEASES** : and water.
- DIARRHOEA** : Frequent fluid or watery stools. In serious cases, it may lead to dehydration and death.
- D.D.T.** : Dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane, a well known pesticide.
- EXPORT** : Sending out goods to other countries.
- O.P.D.** : It is an abbreviation for the term “Out Patient Department”. One has to show in this department before any further action is taken in a hospital.
- PUBLIC** : An activity or service meant for all citizens and organised by the government.
- RURAL** : Pertaining to villages.

TIME TO LEARN

A. Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)

1. Which of the following statements is incorrect? [HOTS]
- (a) A majority of Indians can't really afford treatment in private hospitals.
 - (b) It is our basic right to get proper and timely treatment in government hospitals.
 - (c) It is the government's responsibility to safeguard the right to life of every individual.
 - (d) None of these
2. Why are more private health facilities located in urban areas?
- (a) Because urban areas have more patients.
 - (b) Because urban areas have less patients.
 - (c) Because cities provide better opportunities to doctors in terms of earning and facilities.
 - (d) All of these.
3. Choose a correct statement.
- (a) Treatment at a government hospital is fast and costly.
 - (b) Treatment at a government hospital is cheap but slow and cumbersome.
 - (c) Treatment at a private hospital is costly but time-consuming and slow.
 - (d) None of these.
4. What is medical tourism?
- (a) Visiting a country for sight seeing
 - (b) Visiting a country for studying medicine and surgery.
 - (c) Visiting a country for medical treatment.
 - (d) Visiting botanical gardens, forest and wildlife.
5. Which state government decided to allocate 40 per cent of the state's funds to the Panchayats in 1996?
- (a) Kerala
 - (b) Karanataka
 - (c) Punjab
 - (d) Bihar
6. Which country in Latin America decided not to spend money on defence/army and to divert all funds to basic facilities for its people?
- (a) Panama
 - (b) Honduras
 - (c) Costa Rica
 - (d) Mexico

B. Match the following columns

Column A	Column B
1. Hospital	(a) 15000 doctors every year
2. Costa Rica	(b) OPD
3. Diarrhoea	(c) Patients
4. India produces almost	(d) Latin America
5. Blood test	(e) Diagnosis
6. Out Patient Department	(f) Loose motions

C. Very short answer type questions

1. Give the full form of PHC.
2. What was the problem faced by Hakim Sheik?
3. Which significant step was undertaken by the Kerala government in 1996?
4. Which decision was taken by the government of Costa Rica?
5. Suggest two steps to improve the health situation in India.

D. Short answer type questions

1. Why should the government look after public health? [HOTS]
2. Discuss the different ways through which the government can improve and provide healthcare for all.
3. How would you try to remain in good health?
4. Describe the role of anganwadis in healthcare.
5. What differences do you find between private and public health services?

E. Long answer type questions

1. Describe the story of Hakim Sheik. Why did the State Government reimburse the amount of money he had to spend at the private hospital for his treatment?
2. What was the unique decision taken by Kerala government in 1996? What was its effect?
3. 'The healthiest of all countries of Latin America is Costa Rica? Why?
4. 'It is our basic right to get proper and timely treatment at government hospitals'. Discuss. [Value Based Question]

F. Project

Prepare a project report on government health facilities in India or your state.

Method : (a) Describe the provisions in the Constitution regarding healthcare.

(b) Mention the names of prominent hospitals located in Delhi and their working, problem, etc.

(c) Describe the state of government hospitals, facilities thereof, recent developments, main hospitals in various states.

(d) Steps/measures to be taken to improve healthcare facilities at government hospitals.

G. Activity

1. Organise a forum consisting of children of your locality and teach the benefits and ways of keeping good health.
2. Visit a big government hospital and a private hospital of your city/town. See the working and facilities available. Talk to patients, doctors and the managerial staff. Prepare a note.

3. Government schools have introduced mid-day meal scheme for children. This has led to increased attendance of poor children in schools. Do, you think this scheme has any health benefits? Find out the drawbacks of this scheme and suggest steps for improvement.

LIFE SKILLS

Read the following passage. Discuss what you learnt from the story.

An old farmer had four sons. By dint of hard work and honesty he had acquired huge wealth. But his children were quarrelsome and often fought on trivial issues. The farmer was quite worried. After some time, he fell ill. He called his sons one by one and told each to bring a stick. First he asked each son to break a stick. They broke it easily. Then he tied all the sticks in a bundle and asked each one to break it. Each of the sons tried hard but could not break the bundle of sticks tied together. Just then the old farmer passed away.



MIND MAP

