

Government spending can benefit emergency medical services in India

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When Finance Minister Arun Jaitley announced the Union Budget for 2018-19 earlier this year, the Government reiterated its plan to achieve a high growth rate of 8%. He drew attention to how Indian polity, economy, and society had shown great resilience in the face of adjusting to structural reforms. In light of this, the Budget focused on rural development and strengthening the agricultural sector, infrastructural development, and providing quality education across the country. The Union Budget also committed towards ensuring quality healthcare for the economically less privileged, and saw the launch of the world's largest publicly funded healthcare programme. Under this, 10 crore low income families will each receive up to Rs 5 lakhs per year, in government aid, for basic services.

While this is certainly a welcome move, India still has a long way to go if we are to catch up with our Western counterparts. A large part of the reason for the lag is that in India, the total expense on healthcare is just approximately 4 percent of our GDP, whereas the United States allocated 17 percent towards the same. Similarly, close to 70 percent of the Indian population pays for medical bills out of their own pockets, compared to the US, where the out of pocket expenditure is as low as 10-12 percent. In a survey conducted by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the US ranked 37 among the best performing countries in the healthcare sector, while India stood at 112.

If India is to improve its ranking, as well as healthcare offerings, the Government should look at increasing its spends in healthcare, and investing more in emergency medical services, for which, life support ambulances are key to developing the sector. It is a proven fact, that a patient who receives basic emergency medical care, and is transported to a hospital within 15-20 minutes of a mishap, has the highest survival rates. To this extent, dialing a number from the list of emergency numbers in India can be the biggest difference between a life saved and a life lost.

Emergency medical services, including life support ambulances, have been in existence for a while now, but have comparatively new beginnings in India. If we are to use this to the fullest, the Government needs to increase its spending in the sector, in order to achieve improved outcomes and decreased morbidity and mortality rates.

In India, the sector is still largely fragmented, and investing in it can bear several advantages, the foremost being that of improved public health. Investing in life support ambulances would give the public a greater chance of being able to access quality healthcare, thereby saving precious lives. Reduced cost of healthcare is also possible with government intervention and investment. If the government is to invest in the sector and help lower the costs of treatment, it would greatly help

influence people's decisions to get treatment for conditions that would otherwise go neglected owing to the cost factor. It is here also, that a pre-determined list of emergency numbers in India can help citizens avail medical help at the earliest.

By investing in emergency medical services, there is no doubt, then, that we will be able to enjoy a better source of employment, as it will create a huge demand for doctors, nurses, paramedics, drivers, support staff, and more. Alternatively, it will also help improve the accuracy of data samples, and provide authorities with a clearer picture of healthcare in the country.

Looking forward, we need to understand that public healthcare is not something we can ignore, and that, if we are to improve our rankings, investing in emergency medical services is the need of the hour.

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