

Combating medical fraud in India

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The health sector is perhaps one of the most essential to exist within an economy, attracting some of the finest talent that a nation has to offer. The prospect of saving lives and making a difference is attractive to those with an inclination to serve society, and a desire to prevent human suffering, aside from the innumerable monetary incentives. It is for this reason that medicine is known as 'the most noble of all professions' and doctors and nurses are among the most respected and trusted members of the community. Unfortunately, like any other human endeavour, the medical profession has had more than its fair share of serious issues in India.

Medical fraud differs from other kinds of white-collar crime in that it can cause irreparable physical harm to the victim, as opposed to mere financial losses. Due to tax regulations and a lack of stringent application of even those, many unqualified people lie about their credentials, in an attempt to dupe innocent patients. Because these quacks often lack basic medical training, their actions usually have disastrous, sometimes fatal, results.

The recent instance in Uttar Pradesh where 21 people were infected with HIV from contaminated syringes by a quack doctor, is a story that has only become too common due to the sheer scope for fraud in the Indian medical sector. According to a World Health Organization report on the state of healthcare in India among allopathic doctors, as many as 31.4% of the claimed doctors were discovered to have been educated only up to a secondary level. In fact, an astounding 57.3% did not possess any medical degree whatsoever. The statistics among dentists were even more damning, with 46.2% of all urban and just 27.4% of all rural dentists having the minimum legal qualifications to practice their profession. These numbers alone are indicative that a significant portion of medical practitioners in India are committing fraud in broad daylight, risking people's personal safety and severely impacting the integrity of this noble profession. To weed out quacks, frauds, and unscrupulous doctors, it is necessary to take effective counter measures, especially given the fact that millions of lives are at risk.

The best solution to this problem is to deploy vast on-field strength and technological capabilities to create a data repository of verified doctors. This can be achieved by

- Visiting each doctor on the ground to register their biometric details along with copies of their medical degrees.
- Authenticating these degrees and certificates at source, which means cross verified with the college/university along with the doctors' residency details.
- Genuine doctors' data be then uploaded to the repository creating a master list of medical professionals in a variety of fields and specialisations.
- Data of fake doctors also be uploaded so patients can be fairly warned
- Government store this repository on online & offline public domains, freely available to the public.

This database will ensure that patients' trust is backed up by thorough validation of the doctors qualifications and secure credentials. This can only be achieved by –

This system, which should be made accessible to the general public, would allow a patient or an organisation to easily choose from a database of verified doctors anywhere in the country, improving security and consumer confidence substantially.

With effective risk management adoption at national level, instances of fraud will significantly reduce. Such a system would also serve as a strong deterrent for any person contemplating a career as a fake doctor. It will go a long way in rebuilding people's trust in regulatory institutions which have failed to protect us so far. Creating such a repository will take tremendous will and professional engagement, but as a nation we have all the necessary expertise and resources to achieve this ideal.

-Hitesh Asrani, Founder & Director, CRP Risk Management