BioSpectrum
the business of Bi
24 years of leveraging the business of Bio
www.biospectrumindia.co

Awareness Of EMS Services In India: A Need Of The Hour

22 April 2019 | Features | By Manish Sacheti

Emergency medical services (EMS) in the country are still in a fragmented stage



With a population of more than 1.3 billion people, India is among the most populated countries in the world. However, while it has come a long way from being regarded only as “transport vehicles for patients”, emergency medical services (EMS) in the

country are still in a fragmented stage, compared to foreign counterparts. Every year, close to 33% of road accident victims and 99% of cardiac arrest victims lose their lives, in India, compared to 2% and 70% in the US. The majority of such outcomes materialise because of the lack of available EMS services and awareness regarding them, as a result of which, patients fail to receive the critical, life-saving emergency care within the “Golden Hour”.

While most states in India operate various models of EMS supported by the National Health Mission (NHM), the 108 helpline is the most widely used model, which provides emergency medical services to patients requiring urgent critical care, as well as trauma and accident victims. However, awareness regarding the helpline continues to be abysmally low, as a result of which, most first responders fail to provide help within the stipulated time. The lack of awareness regarding the same among rural communities, which constitute over 70% of the Indian population, also proves to be a major challenge in establishing an organised EMS system in these areas.

The situation is further worsened by the plethora of overlapping helplines that exist in the country, on a national, as well as state level. For instance, 102 is the number to dial to obtain emergency ambulance services as well, while 104 is the medicaladvice helpline number.

There is a lot of disparities regarding the national emergency helpline number. Even though, 112 has been announced as the nationonal helpline numer, 108 is still operational in several states. In order to clear this confusion, the Government has been trying to consolidate 112 as the unified national helpline number for India, especially since 112 is actually the GSM standard for an emergency number, besides also being the standard emergency helpline number in the majority of the European Union,as well asseveral other countries around the globe. The reason behind this is that users can dial 112 and reach the helpline service even without an active mobile connection, as long as the mobile phoneis connected to a GSM network.

In light of this, the need of the hour right now is to take active, aggressive steps to raise awareness regarding this helpline number, not just among the urban population, but also the rural one. In order to make that possible, the Government needs to legally establish 112 as the country’s designated national emergency helpline number through legislation and accreditation,to address all kinds of distress calls such as police, fire, and emergency ambulances. Following that, steps must also be taken to increase awareness regarding the same, in consultation with the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI). This can be done through a range of advertisement campaigns, as well as rural awareness drives.

Efforts must also be made to make people aware of the various laws and regulations which have been designed to make emergency medical services more accessible and available. Earlier, a majority of Indians would also be afraid of coming forward to help victims of accidents for fear of interrogation regarding the incident, obligatory court appearances, and more. To provide a solution to this, laws have also been passed to protect the interests of helpful bystanders who try to assist the victim and call the emergency service number in case of such a situation. The chief among these is the Good Samaritan Law, which prevents first responders to an accident from being harassedby the police.

The need for collaborative steps to improve awareness regarding the same, by stakeholders in EMS services, members of academia, activists, lawmakers, and the Government, is more than ever. This will not only help bring down the number of avoidable fatalities in the country, but also lead toa wide-scale evolution of the EMS sector in India.

Manish Sacheti, COO, Ziqitza Health Care