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Taking a health systems approach is the need of the hour: TGI

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The George Institute for Global Health India welcomes the detailed guidelines on essential health services announced by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare recently.

The guidelines emphasise the need for ensuring that essential health services for non-COVID conditions are not neglected as additional activities for COVID-19 are scaled-up.

“It is heartening to note that the Government has acknowledged the need for continuing care for chronic and critically ill persons and providing other essential health services through the community health workers or Front Line Health Workers (FLHWs) like the ASHAs. In a policy note to the National Health Systems Resource Centre we have highlighted the need for a clear guidance for community health workers on essential services, services that can be postponed and additional COVID-19 activities,” says Dr. Soumyadeep Bhaumik, Research Fellow, The George Institute for Global Health, India.

The policy note was prepared by The George Institute India researchers based on the global evidence from recent pandemics to understand issues and challenges for during COVID-19 and provided to NHRSC on 23rd March 2020.

The note says engaging FLHWs like ASHA who continue to perform routine service delivery in identification and listing of COVID-19 patients, is not without its risk including that of transmission of COVID-19. “A role focussed on creating awareness and support for prevention and countering social stigma is better suited for FLHWs,” it argues.

Also, the lockdown has affected delivery of several chronic services especially the provision of dialysis. The George Institute has been pointing out the need for continuing these services, and research staff of the Institute have been working closely with the district administration in Srikakulam to ensure that people are able to reach dialysis centres.

“Centers that provide lifesaving dialysis treatment have been asked to shut down. The new guidance would help State Governments and local administration in devising mechanisms that can help continue such essential services,” says Prof Vivekanand Jha, Executive Director, George Institute for Global Health, India

The Institute has also been advocating the need to take a health systems approach to COVID-19 to ensure that preventing deaths due to COVID-19 does not come at the expense of deaths because of COVID-19. “These guidelines will ensure States strike a balance,” says Dr Bhaumik