

Health research gets a major push in 12th plan

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Spearheading the key initiatives in health research, the DHR and ICMR have been boosted with doubled budget allocation for the implementation of various schemes and research initiatives in the next five years. These premier medical research agencies have played a significant role in development of indigenous reagents for H1N1, indigenous vaccines for H1N1, reagents/tests for Japanese Encephalitis, dengue etc. During the last five years, altogether 20 virology laboratories have been upgraded and 16 new laboratories including 14 bio safety laboratory II level and 2 bio safety III level established for working on viral diseases and TB.

As per the release issued by the health ministry on achievements made in last five years, the Asia's first bio safety IV level laboratory has been established in 2012 at National Institute of Virology, Pune in collaboration with the Department of Science and Technology (DST). The laboratory has started working on 75 leads of potential public health importance for development and evaluation of affordable diagnostics including indigenously developed tests for diabetes, diagnostic test for TB and several other infections and cancer. Work on 30 such technologies will be completed during 2013-14.

Major focus on infrastructure development

The National Research and Environment Health (NREH) was established at Bhopal as 31st institute of ICMR. The institute will focus on long term effects of MIC exposure, health hazards due to chemical exposures and environmental pollution. Bhopal Memorial Hospital and Research Centre has been taken over by ICMR. National Centre for Diseases

Informatics and Research was established at Bangalore to develop and sustain a national research data base on cancer, diabetes, CVD and stroke by using information technology for national collaborative network. New field stations of ICMR Institutes were established at Car Nicobar, Nancowry (Andaman & Nicobar Islands), Gorakhpur (UP), Alappuzha (Kerala) Rayagada and Kalahandi (Odisha) and Guwahati (Assam) to serve the health problems of the local communities. A National Clinical Trials Registry in India, an online system for registration of all clinical trials, has been established to improve transparency, accountability and accessibility in order to re-establish public trust in clinical trial data.

Upcoming research and policy initiatives

In order to meet the shortfall in its healthcare spending, the amount of Rs 10,000 crore has been earmarked for the Department of Health Research and Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) during 12th five year plan (2012-2017) as against about Rs 4400 crore in 11th plan. Multi-disciplinary research units are proposed to be set up in all 150 government medical colleges at a cost of Rs.1118 crore to have a dedicated infrastructure for research in medical colleges. More than 50 proposals have been received from 20 states so far. A network of viral and other infectious disease diagnostic research laboratories will be set up for handling viral diseases like TB etc. 200 district level medical labs and 48 state level labs and 6 regional labs are proposed to be established during 12th Plan at a cost of Rs.1084 crore. A new scheme is being launched to train mid-career medical teachers and scientists to develop human resource in cutting edge areas of medical and health research. 3000 students and researchers are expected to be benefited by these fellowships.

Among the guidelines that have been developed are the prevention, management and control of reproductive tract infections including sexually transmitted infections, management of diabetes, management of three type of cancers (oral, buccal and stomach), revised nutritional guidelines. Also the guidelines on genetically modified foods and probiotics were released. The policies in pipeline include the bill on assisted reproductive technology, a bill on recognition of alternate systems of medicine, bill on biomedical research on human participants, knowledge management policy and e-governance, national health research policy and accreditation of health research institutes.