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PPP, technology only solutions to meet healthcare challenge

18 August 2014 | News | By BioSpectrum Bureau

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Inviting active industry participation to provide healthcare services in India, Dr Jagdish Prasad, director general - Health Services, ministry of health and family welfare, government of India said, "Industry should adopt one district in each state, upgrading medical facilities in District health centers and primary health centers to provide best possible quality healthcare services to the common man. He was addressing the CII Conclave on "NextGen Healthcare - Roadmap: Healthcare for All", organized by the Confederation of Indian Industry in New Delhi recently.

Calling Public Private Partnerships as the only solution to vast prevailing disparity in healthcare, he appealed to the industry, cooperatives and NGOs for support, specifically in strengthening healthcare delivery systems, drug distribution, use of Information Technology (IT), latest technologies and enhanced pharma supply chain management.

"We are ready to support you with funds, even in converting district hospitals into world class medical hospitals but the industry will have to ensure that proper delivery systemsÂ and a strengthened supply chain are available, so that the facilities and medicines reach the last person in the remotest areas", he further highlighted.

Highlighting the solutions for this challenge, he called for "Integration ofÂ five key ministries i.e the ministry for rural development, women and child welfare, water, urban sanitation, education and health. Presently, we are all working in isolation of each other and do not know what the other ministries are doing. If these five ministries can drive coordinated campaigns and launch joint schemes, then we would be far better equipped to provide quality healthcare to each and every individual of this country."

"This is because some of the challenges lie outside health-care policy. Two-thirds of the health problems can also be solved by providing safe drinking water and sanitation. Even if we concentrate on these basic facilities, we can control many waterborne and airborne infectious diseases", he added.

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"Each year 39 million people in India enter BPL category due to poor delivery of healthcare services. To confront this, the industry has to bypass the rules and regulations and bureaucratic bottlenecks to find innovative ways or build confidence with Chief Ministers and get MC regulations eased, to build world class hospitals and strengthen the healthcare delivery system in India. For this, the key is good intent and strong political will of the government", emphasized the DG.

"I would even recommend altering the constitution to make healthcare, which is presently a state subject, a central subject. The state governments and bureaucracy are not as proactive as they should be. For example, we adopted and provided money to 238 districts out of total 730 odd districts to create special Cardiac clinics across India, but only 37 centers have come up so far, that too majorly in the south and very few in Rajasthan and Gujarat. None of the other northern states benefitted from this scheme. In the 12th five year plan, we have decided to develop 20 National Cancer Centers at a cost of Rs 120 crores" shared Dr Prasad.

"Our ministry is also planning to open AIIMS in all states and create ideal healthcare centers across different states with world class standards at Rs 50 crore each and would ask state governments to replicate similar standards in others as well. We would soon launch a web portal and E mechanism for public health delivery like supply chain management, drug distribution and recognition, hospitals and available healthcare facilities for different diseases etc," further informed the DG.

Dr (Prof) Ranjit Roy Chaudhary, principal advisor to the Hon'ble Health Minister, Government of India highlighted that " We would soon launch a scheme called 'Healthcare Assurance for all citizens' which would cover each and every citizen of the country. Presently, only 25 percent of our population is insured."

"Further, we are also working towards providing transparency in drug manufacturing. We will soon launch a web portal for the citizens and manufacturers, where applications, registration and licenses etc can be easily done. In rural areas, we are planning to build teams of 2-3 people including Ayush practitioners, to whom we would provide a 1 year 'bridging course'. Use of IT for better healthcare is also high on the agenda of the new government," informed Mr Chaudhary.

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"Though the share of Healthcare sector has increased from 0.9 percent to 2.5 percent of GDP in the 12th Five Year Plan, but it is still far low as compared to other countries, considering the diverse challenges of our vast country. For example, US spends 20 percent of its GDP on healthcare. Hence, we need the support of all stakeholders like the Industry, NGOs, cooperatives etc. Industry presently spends 70 percent of the total spend on healthcare while government spends 30 percent.

What we also need is the maximum utilization of the funds", Mr Chaudhary furtehr said.

"It is very disheartening that still, 45 percent of the Indian children are malnourished, our mothers are anemic, our villages have poor hygiene, while around 400 million abject poor are deprived of any healthcare services in India. Hence, we need to gear up our healthcare delivery mechanisms and for this, partnership is the only solution. There is a $160 billion untapped potential in healthcare including hospitals, pharmaceuticals and delivery systems etc in India, which the industry can really benefit from. With latest technologies, we can reach out to even the last man in the remotest area in the present day Digital India, since 900 million people in India are accessible through mobile phones while another 120 million through internet", Mr Harpal Singh, chairman, CII NextGen Healthcare Conclave and past chairman, CII NR.

"Some key issues that need to be addressed include lack of infrastructure and manpower, inaccessibility of healthcare services, shortage of medical specialists and inefficiency of public healthcare providers. Though, in major urban areas, healthcare is of adequate quality and accessible, but its access is limited or unavailable in most rural areas and Tier II and Tier III cities, for which technology and partnership are the answer", said Mr Shreekant Somany, deputy chairman, CII Northern Region and chairman and managing director, Somany Ceramics Ltd.