

UN backed panel deliberates on universal health coverage in India

09 May 2014 | News | By Rahul Koul Koul

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"The disease burden, infrastructural and personnel requirements and health financing situation are the three elements that need to be analyzed to plan the design of the UHC model(s) to be rolled out in India," remarked Professor Indrani Gupta, Institute of Economic Growth at a panel discussion supported by the United Nations in India deliberated on India's route to Universal Health Coverage.

"The ministry of health and family welfare has already suggested a list of indicators for an essential health package which need to be taken into consideration. The roll out process has to be accompanied by a solid management information system and monitoring and evaluation framework from the start, to help in course correction based on evaluations," Prof Gupta added.

In her remarks, Lise Grande, United Nations Resident Coordinator said, "Universal Health Coverage is a high priority in India. We are particularly worried about families who fall below the poverty line when someone falls ill and the family has to struggle to pay for health care."

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Nata Menabde, WHO Representative to India highlighted the importance of substantially increasing the government expenditure on health in India which is one of the lowest in the world, at around one percent of GDP. She commended the policy intent outlined by the Planning Commission to increase government spending on health to 1.87 percent of GDP by 2017.

About 100 participants consisting of officials, professionals, students from health and development related institutions, the media and the United Nations attended the panel discussion.

Outlining that no country in the world has fully 'achieved' UHC in a short period as there is always some gap between the need and utilization, and there is also scope for improvement of quality and financial protection, Dr. Menabde said, "Universal Health Coverage should be conceptualized as a direction rather than a destination, an idea that is relevant for India."

The discussion with WHO experts from different regions of the Organization was moderated by Dr Antonio Duran, Advisor, WHO Country Office for India. The experts shared examples from various countries on the UHC experiences, what works and what doesn't.

It was also brought out that India's progress towards UHC does not merely require a higher level of public financing for providing and purchasing health care in an integrated manner but also sustained efforts to hasten the development of a well governed health system allowing better access to quality medicines, vaccines and new and appropriate technologies as also strengthening of human resources for health.