

Changing healthcare for few - What about others?

¹Dr Amitabh Mohan Jerath, ²Dr Gurbilas Singh

^{1,2}Consultant Gastroenterologist, Fortis Hospital Amritsar, Punjab, India

Only Change is permanent-A philosophical statement but so true to the core. The last decade or two have been the decades of "CHANGE". So much has changed in this period that if you picture the world twenty years back, it's almost a complete recast. But then it's a little unfortunate that a lot of these changes have affected human health and healthcare systems in a negative manner.

Counting on factors affecting human health, one important factor is increased stress in this fast moving world where stress is more on achieving goals and less on how that's done. The corporate man on the run with a subway sandwich or any other super junk in one hand and a laptop as the only constant friend is all but ingredients for good health. Food timings are a thing of the past and healthy food is rarely discussed subject in most such groups. Exercising is a passion amongst few, but for most 24 hours a day is too short of period to afford any room for exercising. The luxury of transportation in motorised vehicles has knocked the old health tools like Bicycle totally out of contention and even the relatively less affording class has graduated to mobikes.

Use of fertilisers in developing countries is another such factor which is always put under wraps. The adverse effect of such rampant use of these chemicals in more than prescribed limits has put the entire population at risk because the produce is distributed over a wide area. Similarly unchecked water pollution by industries is poisoning the water bodies and everyone dependent on that water. The rise in Alcohol consumption is another health hazard

which is growing by the day. Latest estimate is an average 12 bottles of proof liquor per person per year in Punjab in 2014-15. ^[1] Its alarming to see alcohol related liver and other diseases in younger population. Tobacco consumption is still high, in spite of so many awareness campaigns. Intravenous drug abuse in border belt in Punjab has already reached giant proportions and promises to be a Frankenstein in the years to come. Along this it also is contributing directly to increase in viral diseases like Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and HIV, though there are other factors also. Epidemics due to unsafe injection practices have been documented in India (hepatitis B carriage and C infection is 46% and 38%, respectively). ^[2]

In this scenario where diseases are on the rise and tentacles have gone out to affect newer groups of populations there are direct and indirect victims. To handle this we need an effective healthcare system which can afford a latest, quick, effective and affordable solution to the patients. Access to basic health services was affirmed as a fundamental human right in the Declaration of Alma-Ata in 1978. ^[3] In spite of oft repeated slogans like "HEALTH FOR ALL BY 2000" the ground reality is bitter. Health has assumed different meanings for rich and poor. For a rich person health means annual health check as a corporate necessity. In case of need there is a three to five star Hospital facility (depending upon the city he is in) waiting to pamper him with all the comforts, howsoever trivial the health issue may be. All the latest gadgets are put into service to scan every nook and corner of his body before

reaching any conclusion. There are different specialists and super-specialists attending to make sure that nothing is missed. Needless to say that such facility comes at a price which is out of reach for most people.

On the other hand an average man still has to cope with smaller facilities found near to his place mostly managed by a single Doctor or a couple with few visiting consultants. The facilities are few and for most fanciful investigations he has to be transferred frequently to different centres in the city. Most visiting consultants come for a short time according to their comfort and leave after giving their opinion. As cost is a major factor in decision making therefore any high cost treatment mostly means a signal for most to take the patient back home for the inevitable. As for government hospitals the lesser said the better. The facilities and the numbers are so miniscule that their contribution to the total healthcare is abysmal. This picture is frightening. Such massive contrast of health services for different classes is by itself a recipe for chaos. The big corporate hospitals are being run by big business houses. For them healthcare is a big business and it ends there. There are goals set for them to achieve and there are teams and departments set up for achieving them. All this is passed to the medical work force and slowly a system is evolving where everyone is being assessed on the basis of revenue generated. This slow but sure change in healthcare vision has not gone well with many. No doubt all this marketing, planning, executing teams add to the cost to be borne by the hapless patient.

The need of the hour is to evolve a healthcare system which is able to give the near best treatment at a lesser cost. If government can do it then nothing like it but that looks unlikely. If not then there

have to be some policies governing healthcare from private entrepreneurs at the earliest.

Each hospital has to be graded as A, B, C or D depending upon its layout, facilities and doctors. Cost has to be decided for each and every procedure and has to be tagged to the hospital grading. Good quality drugs at a control rate to be supplied to the hospitals. Subsidized space shall be provided to all the hospitals to make such projects viable. Govt. websites and agencies should help in marketing the facilities at low cost. Tax rebates for all healthcare projects. Last but most importantly a well thought off Insurance policy for population at large“Less than 15% of the population in India today has any kind of health-care cover noted a July 2009 report by the FICCI. [4] Its time we change some things and CHANGE FOR THE BETTER. Hope someone’s listening.

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