

Rising Healthcare Costs: Need to Strengthen Health System More Today Than Ever Before

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We are passing through a challenging time with rising population, and limited resource expansion which is unable to meet growing needs of the world population, and quadruples disease burden, and climate change consequences among others(1). Healthcare needs of growing populations around the world are increasing and available resources are falling short to meet them. Governments are increasingly passing on healthcare burden to the private sector, with communities increasingly faced with out of pocket expenses to meet unmet healthcare needs.

Technological advancement is offering expensive diagnostic and treatment options (2). This is increasing healthcare costs, since lack of focus on health maintenance and disease prevention is causing need to diagnose and treat advanced disease at enormous costs, and disease outcomes are also far from satisfactory..

We are faced with quadruple disease burden having communicable diseases, non-communicable diseases, injuries and spiritual aspects needing to be addressed by healthcare professionals. This requires a comprehensive, holistic and multifaceted approach while dealing with healthcare issues at individual as well as a community level. It requires an approach that focuses on delivery of high quality, and cost effective and safe healthcare. Approaches should provide ongoing preventive, curative and rehabilitative healthcare. Such a scientific approach ensures not only efficient use of limited resources, it also positively impacts health related outcomes (3,4).

An effective population focused approach that effectively addresses and controls rising world population is long term solution to reduce burden on limited available resources (5). Population control can only be achieved with the active involvement of all stakeholders including governments, non-government organizations, private sector and academic institutions in particular. A human

development approach that focuses on education, health, social development and employment opportunities will be required to address increasing healthcare related challenges currently faced by our communities. An educated family that is gainfully employed and has access to resources, can efficiently manage healthcare needs. Women's education(6) is particularly important in development of communities and society.

Climate change(7) is again a growing challenge today. With rising global temperature, extreme weather conditions including droughts and floods cause food shortages and famines. Unless climate change is addressed on an urgent basis, healthcare provision and healthcare of individuals and communities will be compromised. Climate change consequences can be efficiently addressed with the active involvement of all stakeholders including governments, non-government organizations, private sector and academic institutions in particular. Carbon emissions and damage to ozone layer need to be addressed, with more focus on use of clean renewable energy resources.

Advent of Artificial Intelligence(8) is an opportunity to address growing healthcare needs of communities. It offers opportunity but at the same time there are challenges to ensure humane elements of healthcare are not compromised.

At healthcare delivery level, health system development is needed more today than ever before. It can help address enormous challenges we face today, to address growing healthcare needs on one hand and limited resources at the other.

Overall health system strengthening is required. It needs to be made operational and effective, so that it can positively impact health related outcomes.

Overall health systems need strengthening from primary health care, secondary, tertiary and Quaternary healthcare. Strengthening at various levels should be in proportion to requirement of health care needs. A primary health care focus should be on provision of cost effective, high quality and safe healthcare with positive impact on health related outcomes. Its focus on health maintenance and disease prevention reduces burden on other higher levels of healthcare that come with rising costs. Its strong focus on community based first contact care with individuals within community results in better healthcare related outcomes. Having a focus on strong communication skills and health education, healthcare interventions are better understood and followed by patients. A strong focus on person centered care(9) that not only addresses healthcare needs at individual level, ensures focus on health maintenance and disease prevention.

Secondary, tertiary and Quaternary healthcare levels are also very important for an effective health system. These higher levels of care require higher level of resources and come at higher costs. Therefore it becomes important to have an effective primary healthcare system, to effectively manage the majority of health care needs of the community, and at much lower costs and with positive health related outcomes. This will ensure that limited healthcare related disease burden is passed on to higher levels of health system, to ensure the efficient use of limited resources.

It is important to have an operational health system. The majority of healthcare needs of communities should be addressed at primary health care level and only those patients with need for higher levels of healthcare should be referred to higher levels of the health system. There should be provision for return to lower levels of health system once higher levels of health care are addressed. There should be provision for shared care that benefits patients.

A very strong focus is required on research(10) that addresses healthcare challenges and needs. Best practices based on latest evidence need to be implemented. Healthcare professional training programs are required to ensure presence of an effective healthcare delivery workforce. It is important to develop strong leadership skills among healthcare professionals to help bring positive health related change in society.

Today we stand at cross roads. Efforts we put in place today will determine how we effectively tackle rising healthcare related costs in a resource constrained world. We need to act now, to ensure health of future generations.

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