

Lifestyle Diseases – No Longer An Urban Dilemma



L-R: Dr.Srinath Reddy, President, Public Health Foundation of India; Shivinder Mohan Singh, Managing Director, Fortis Healthcare; Prathap Reddy, Chairman, Apollo Hospitals Group; Shikha Sharma, Managing Director, Nutri-Health Systems Pvt. Ltd.; Moderator: Sudha Iyer, Chairperson and Managing Director, Srijana Group of Companies

Urban pressures and lifestyle choices seem to be taking a toll on the lives of millions of Indians today. Life threatening diseases like diabetes, cardio vascular problems and strokes have today become part of daily life, and have led to at least 7 million deaths by the year 2020. This is even as people are increasingly being afflicted by lifestyle related diseases like depression, and hypertension. In fact, almost 80 per cent of the cases of hypertension reported are due to lifestyle related disorders and stress, and this is not limited to only the urban areas.

This was the main theme that emerged at the session on 'Lifestyle diseases – The collateral damage of urbanization', hosted by **Aspen Institute India** here on Thursday. The session focused on the rising incidence of lifestyle related diseases and discussed the measures that should be taken to combat them.

Initiating the discussion, **Dr Shikha Sharma, Managing Director, Nutri Health Systems Pvt. Ltd.**, said that "the notion that preventive steps can help prevent the occurrence of such diseases is not part of the health belief system of the people in India. People, especially youngsters, have the requisite knowledge but we do not see them translating this knowledge into action."

Today, people are normally involved in physical activities only by virtue of their profession, i.e., they are in the army or the paramilitary services. Dr Sharma said that family, society and even healthcare institutions should

emphasize on healthcare related issues right from the childhood because "that is the time people learn the most."

Quoting Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, **Dr Prathap Reddy, Chairman, Apollo Hospitals Group**, said that, "we all have a purpose and that is that we should perform well and make others also perform well." Focusing on reaching out to the rural populace, he said that people need to be motivated and mindsets need to be changed. In this regard, he said that if healthcare centres were opened in offices and workplaces, the motivation levels of the public would change for the better.

He said that rural healthcare facilities today were in a dismal state as there is no adequate human resource in the sector. For this, it is necessary that we take "education to all, particularly the rural people."

Mr Shivinder Mohan Singh, Managing Director, Fortis Healthcare, said that there was an urgent need to reduce the cost of providing healthcare to the public, especially in the rural areas. In this regard, he said that there was need to improve the human resources in the sector, develop good technology and equipment based on the principle of 'high value-low cost'.

"Lifestyle diseases are assuming enormous proportions in the country today," he said adding that "people have psychological issues and live in a state of constant denial. So, mindsets have to be changed and attitudes modified. "

On his part, **Dr Srinath Reddy, President, Public Health Foundation of India**, said that changing living habits have aggravated the risk of lifestyle diseases. He blamed bad diet, physical inactivity and stress as the drivers. "No wonder India won the gold medal in Olympics in a sport that is centered around standing still," he said, adding that preventive measures need to be taken early in life and there is a need to provide health literacy to people.

Stressing on improving involvement with the young, he said that health education needs to be initiated in schools. He said that information should be provided on health literacy and people need to be motivated and provided with the requisite skill sets and a supportive environment and services.

The session, moderated by Ms **Sudha Iyer, Chairperson and Managing Director, Srijana Group**, also emphasized on the role of community health providers in tackling the problem of the growing trajectory of lifestyle related diseases in the country.

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