

Mobile Health Delivery System Advocated

Dr Naresh Trehan, Senior Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgeon, Apollo Hospitals, advocated a mobile health delivery system combined with Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) and functional district hospitals to increase access to health care. Speaking at concurrent session on 'Balancing Quality Healthcare and Basic Accessibility' as part of four-day Ideas India 2008 hosted by Aspen Institute India, Dr Trehan said that instead of aiming for a functional health centre or hospital at each village, a team of doctors and healthcare workers can visit each village every three to four days.

Dr A K Mukherjee, Director General, Indian Spinal Injuries Centre, said that India has the second largest health infrastructure in the world but it is not functional. We have the entire chain of primary, secondary and tertiary care system but there are several factors that affect the accessibility for the poor. He suggested more involvement of NGOs in the health care.

Dr Srinath Reddy, President, Public Health Foundation of India, said that Ashas and nurses should be given more responsibility. He suggested that instead of sending young doctors to the rural areas, retired doctors can be re-employed or given incentives to work in the villages.

Mr Abhijit Banerjee, Ford Foundation International Professor of Economics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, suggested various ways in which health insurance can be made to work. He noted that the basic problem of health insurance is that it does not help the poor. "They may get reimbursed, but they don't have the money to pay immediately," he said.

Mr Ranjit Roy Chaudhary, National Professor of Pharmacology of the National Academy of Medical Sciences, Chair of the Task Force of the Apollo Hospitals Educational and Research Foundation, who moderated the discussion, said that 2.3 per cent of people go below poverty line because of health expenditure, 1.5 per cent of them because of the cost of medicines, out of which 30 per cent are not needed.

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