

Mentoring frontline health workers as the champions of NCD prevention

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New Delhi: Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) account for 60 percent of deaths in India each year. According to a WHO report, cardiovascular diseases, cancers, respiratory diseases, and diabetes constitute 82 percent of all NCD deaths globally. The burden of NCDs in India, particularly, has grown exponentially in the recent past. Expanding the health workforce is crucial for achieving India's public health goals and ensuring sustainable, comprehensive health across all sections of the country. In view of the inevitability of scaling up capacity building and training of the health workforce on NCDs, Project HOPE in association with Takeda Pharmaceutical organized a National Consultation on "Optimizing the Skills of Health Workforce to Tackle NCDs in India" at Delhi on April 18, 2017.

The Consultation drew experts from the government, corporate, senior endocrinologists and diabetologists, civil society, academia, international donor agencies and more. It was aimed at providing a platform for presenting and discussing the most recent innovations, promising practices, trends, challenges, and the solutions adopted to improve the skills of health workers working in the field of NCDs.

Addressing the Consultation, Dr Laxmikant Palo, the Regional Director for Project HOPE South-East Asia, said, "The quality of NCDs related health outcomes is inextricably dependent on the availability of skilled, motivated and well supported health workforce; and adequate health infrastructure. The public and private sectors need to invest more for continuous improvement of the skills of health

workforce to effectively respond to the growing burden of NCDs in India.”

Dr Ambrish Mithal, Chairman- Division of Endocrinology and Diabetes, Medanta, in the opening remarks called out for the need for a thrust in public-private partnership to address NCDs. Highlighting the rise in the burden of diabetes among the youth in the country, Dr. Mithal drew the attention to the need for skill enhancement of the health workforce and increased use of technology for prevention and management of disease, and for people to bring about behavioural changes in lifestyle.



“Youth energy is powering India’s development and growth story, to sustain which, we need a healthy youth,” said the Chief Guest at the Consultation, Dr Jitendra Singh, the Minister of State (Independent Charge) for the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, PMO, Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, Department of Atomic Energy and Department of Space in his address at the Consultation. “There is great mismatch between the health delivery system in the rural and urban area. This needs to be addressed by a meaningful public-private partnership, to ensure effective, affordable and uniform healthcare which is a Constitutional right of the people of this country. Diabetes is no longer merely a health issue, but a national issue,” he added.

A few healthcare workers from the ground, trained through Project HOPE’s capacity building programmes for combating NCDs, were present at the Consultation. They were invited to share their experiences and understanding of the issues on the ground. Reflecting on the same, Ms Renu Kumari, an ANM (Auxiliary Nurse Midwife) from Jharkhand said, “It is a misconception that diabetes is a rich people’s disease. There should be greater and continued reach of testing camps for the unreached, in the remotest parts of the country.”

The Consultation put forth some key recommendations that include:

- a dedicated medical curriculum on NCDs at the Undergraduate level
- the introduction of a government certified diabetes education course
- increase in the number of skilled specialists in the health workforce
- standardized training module that is uniform and used across the country
- effective use of technology for reach and e-learning for building capacity of frontline workers
- Putting the public first in the public-private partnerships
- AYUSH collaboration for NCD training to expand reach
- Integrating NCDs into the national healthcare plan
- multimodal skill development of the health workforce, including hands-on training

- frontline workers to be provided with information about referral pathways
- social media to be recognized as a key player in creating awareness, especially to address juvenile diabetes

Summarizing the consultation, Dr D Bachani, Director Professor in Community Medicine & Deputy Commissioner (NCD), Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, said, “In the ever-transitioning health scenario, concerting efforts towards developing skills of the existing health workers will strengthen their capacity to provide effective healthcare to the people they serve. This is an era where multitasking is a cost-effective way of optimally utilizing available human resources for healthcare. This is possible only through in-service training of existing health workers and developing need-based curricula for producing human resources for the future.”

Call to Action:

- Assure the projection of health workforce considerations based on the disease burden
- Improve quality and capacity of health workforce through skill and need based training
- Enhance intake capacity of the public and private medical and paramedical training institutes to address shortage of health workers
- Develop a comprehensive national HRH policy that addresses a list of health issues including NCDs
- Institutionalize performance and reward system for health workforce