

Health Care in Pakistan

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Pakistan has struggled in shaping its health care sector ever since its birth. We are still uncertain as to how we should go about providing health care to our common people. During the past, different steps have been taken in the forms of generic medications, RHCs and BHUs, and building big tertiary care hospitals. Moreover, there are not many new health care facilities working at the moment equipped with latest technology and professional expertise. However, the overall state of healthcare is very disappointing in our country and especially in the public sector. It is the responsibility of the state to give health cover to all; especially to the under privileged. In the last 70 years, the state has been unable to fulfill its responsibilities. It is very easy to criticize but very difficult to give sustainable solutions. I remember that I once met a health care provider who had come from UK on a contract basis to help the Metropolitan Corporation Lahore in improving health care services; however, he told me that his contract was cancelled before the prescribed period. I asked him the reason for this and I was informed that he was given a long list of medications, equipment, and civil infrastructure to approve, which he deemed inappropriate. He stated in his recommendations that, like the UK when it started its community health care program, our first priorities should also be housing, sanitation, and drinking water.

This was a very comprehensive statement and this is precisely what we have failed to do in Pakistan with the result that we have been hugely burdened by various diseases and epidemics. Due to the exponential increase in our population levels, the relative increase in health care facilities over the same time has miserably fallen short of the new demand. Consequently, in our country there has been an increase in both communicable as well as non-communicable diseases. Unfortunately, judging by past performances and current trends, including intention or will to improve (or lack thereof), bureaucratic inferences, and competency limitations, it seems that it would become an increasingly difficult task to address health care problems any time soon. Furthermore, there is no effective and well thought-out planned program for the primary care physicians in the public sector. Forgetting our own needs and customs, we have been wasting resources by trying to outsource and giving contracts to foreign experts, who unfortunately do not possess any insight into our local problems, nor are they adequately assisted in that regard. To compound the problem, planning tasks are assigned to non-technical people who are further hindered by the fact that their tenure spans a maximum of 2 to 3 years. Another massive boulder in the way of any substantial progress in health care, like all other sectors in Pakistan, is the problem of corruption which has become an epidemic in its own right, and one which cannot be alleviated by any medication unfortunately. A possible way of going about solving this problem would entail making the systems more powerful so that they would prevail as opposed to the current situation where individual stake precedent over systems. Unless we make our systems stronger, the role of individuals will continue to dominate which facilitates bad governance, and corruption will continue to remain prevalent.

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