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GoI to build a larger digital healthcare ecosystem: Nadda

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India’s focus on improved and strengthened primary and secondary health care services with stress on multiple sectors have yielded results not just in terms of positive health indicators but also in a robust health system, Union Health Minister J P Nadda said Thursday.

was speaking on the theme ‘The Future of Primary Health Care’ at the plenary session of ‘2nd International Conference on Primary Health Care (PHC) towards UHC and SDGs’ at Astana in Kazakhstan. “The Union Health Minister said India has focused on improved primary health care services and established referral linkages including transport and strengthened secondary care services, which have largely focused on maternal, newborn, nutrition, child health and communicable disease.

“Nadda further said that this focus has yielded results, not just in terms of positive health indicators, particularly for those that are primary health care sensitive, but in a robust health systems platform that now gives us the confidence to move from selective to comprehensive primary health care services”.

He said India’s progress in making improvements in maternal, child health and communicable diseases is largely due to the country’s sustained focus on and investing in strengthening health systems for these services.

Nadda said, “The government of India is building a larger digital health ecosystem to help build electronic health record of citizens which is portable & universally accessible through a Health Information Exchange ensuring privacy, security & confidentiality of data.”

The Health Ministry currently has three common applications in use across the country at health and wellness centres – a remarkable feat, considering the size and diversity, he said, adding the apps are for — reproductive child health (RCH), non-communicable diseases (NCD) and the third one for Tuberculosis.

“Over time, we will progress towards a comprehensive primary health care application,” he said. The Union Health Minister said that other digital Health IT initiatives include an inter-operable Electronic Health Records (EHR) system, Patient Feedback System (MeraAspatal), Personal Health Record Management System (PHRMS), National Identification Number (NIN) for both public and private health facilities, which is a unique identification number for health facilities.

Hospital Information System (HIS) is also being implemented for computerized registration and capturing EHR/ EMR of patients in public health facilities up to PHC level, he said. Online Registration System (ORS) is a framework to link various hospitals for online registration and appointments, online diagnostic reports and enquiring availability of blood online, he pointed out.

“We are aiming at establishing an electronic database in all districts by the year 2020, to reduce the burden of paper-based data collection, recording, and storage,” he said.

Nadda said the role of biotechnology in public health has been used to good effect, particularly in primary health care.

“The use of point of care diagnostics, which are gradually being made available at the health and wellness centres, will enable providers to resolve more and refer less, thus improving the continuum of care, reducing patient hardship, and consequent out of pocket expenditure,” the Minister said.

He said multi-sectoral action is a key to addressing social and environmental determinants and India has developed operational strategies to build a shared goal and vision between sectors such as nutrition, drinking water and sanitation, education, rural and urban development departments.