"Indian healthcare sector is currently being plagued by ever growing costs"

16 January 2019 | Interviews

India still lags way behind in ensuring the reach of healthcare to every citizen.

India has progressed significantly in healthcare over the last two decades. However, it still lags way behind in ensuring the reach of healthcare to every citizen. Although the Government of India has introduced various healthcare insurance schemes that are affordable to everyone and provides basic health coverage to all, a number of healthcare challenges still inger on.

Tasneem Fidvi, Assistant Director- Administration, Saifee Hospital exchanged her thoughts with BioSpectrum on the current healthcare scenario.

Edited Excerpts-

What are the current healthcare challenges being faced in India?

The Indian healthcare sector is currently being plagued by ever growing costs at both ends- to the service provider, and the patients. Besides this, with technology evolving and improving by the day, we need to ensure our manpower is efficiently trained to handle highly sophisticated deliverance of care. And it is here, where we face the real challenge. With limited resources and high attrition rates in the healthcare sector, training and development becomes tough, which in turn impacts our desire to offer quality services to the patient. Besides this, there have been constant changes in terms of regulations at Government levels, making it hard to implement, without much clarity.

How can technology play a critical role in improving healthcare delivery?

Biomedical engineering is becoming increasingly important today, with the application of engineering principles being incorporated in medicine and biology for healthcare purposes. As technology makes its way into the medical sector, we have seen newer equipment and approaches being introduced to treat a patient, which has made the process more reliable and thus, delivers better results.

A prime example of this, would be the ventilator, which used to be fairly difficult to use because of the patient's breathing patterns. Today, ventilators are much more advanced than they used to be, and they now work in synchronisation with the

individual's breathing. There has also been a lot of development in terms of artificial intelligence in the medical field, which not only works on preconfigured algorithms, but also creates its own, when required.

Air-conditioning facilities too have been improved, which are of utmost importance in a medical facility. Besides this, pharma and infection control practices have been influenced by technology in a big way, which have resulted in better disinfectants being used across the industry.

In the medical space, technology has taken on a multifaceted role, and has even played a role in developing new-age operating tables. Produced using the technology of simulation, they can provide immense benefit to the patient, by positioning the bed better during surgery. Microscopes which can be used during operations, as well as pin-point radiation surgery by means of a cyberknife are now possible too.

How can health outcomes be aligned with the cost of delivery?

Health outcomes need not necessarily be aligned with the cost of delivery of service. However, there are ways in which one can reduce this gap, and it starts at a personal level, with a small saving by each and every individual, towards their personal health. Preventive medicine too is a viable solution in reducing the burden of healthcare costs, besides taking up insurance covers.

What are your views of reducing the cases of hospital acquired infections?

One of the primary reasons for acquiring infections is unhygienic patient handling habits and practices, which are not in tune with international and national guidelines. One of the main reasons behind hospital acquired infections is the rampant use of a cocktail of antibiotics, which has to come to an end. There has to be a strict adherence to antibiotic policies and setting-up of multi-disciplinary groups in the hospital.

Nowadays though, strict adherence to the hygiene and infection control guidelines is a common practice in many healthcare institutes.The infrastructure of healthcare facilities too must be designed based on several guidelines related to the cleaning of vents, filters, water tanks and such.