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27% Deaths in India caused by poor access to drugs and knowledge: Medicus

19 September 2019 | News

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Medicus aims to utilize the flourishing digital landscape in India to connect all the stakeholders in the healthcare sector – doctors, pharmaceutical companies, social sector organizations, medical associations and government bodies – to ensure that people in remote areas can access round-the-clock and quality health services.

The government's flagship Ayushman Bharat scheme strives to provide affordable healthcare to the last man in the queue, but every year, as many as 122 people per 100,000 in India die due to poor quality of care– independent studies have found that more Indians die of poor quality of healthcare than due to lack of access to healthcare.

Maharashtra is one among the five states that register the highest combined risk of ischemic heart disease, stroke, and diabetes in 2016, which has significantly increased since 1990. As per the data of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS 4), only 56.2 percent of children is fully immunized in 2015-16, which is a drop of more than 2 percent since the previous survey. Besides, 37.4 percent married women do not use family planning methods, up from 35.1 percent during the previous survey and trends show dismal uptake of any method other than female sterilization, such as intra-uterine devices (1.6 per cent), contraceptive pills (2.4 per cent) and condoms (7.1 percent). The state is also struggling to stock adequate medical abortion (MA) pills. An independent study finds that only 1.2 per cent chemists in Maharashtra — three of the 252 reviewed in five cities – have stocks as the rest chose not to citing legal hassles.

Founder of Medicus, Bhavesh Shahsays, "In the hinterlands of India, it is not rare to come across people who have travelled hundreds of kilometers and faced considerable difficulty to get a medicine as basic as a painkiller or anti-allergic. Last year, the Maharashtra Association of Resident Doctors (MARD) complained of shortage of medicines in hospitals of Nagpur, Satara, Miraj, and Nanded. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) too noted that at least 24 states are short of essential drugs. We are about to complete a year of Ayushman Bharat scheme and the shortage of medicines and lack of continuous medical education (CME) of doctors can cause serious damage to this well-intended scheme. This app is a novel concept and we expect it to play a significant role in closing the gap between the unmet needs of the people and availability of health services as well as medicines. About one-third of the deaths that take place in India are preventable and happen only because health services in smaller cities and villages are far from optimum. However, everyone has a smartphone these days. Medicus tries to utilize this deep penetration of digital technologies for the benefit of people by connecting doctors, medicine manufacturers and suppliers, social sector organizations, medical association and the government."

Medicus, a JITO Incubation & Innovation Foundation (JIIF)-backed startup, currently connects over 40,000 doctors to more than 18,000 pin codes across the country. "Doctors can access healthcare news, new medicines, industry trends, peer opinions and discuss their clinical challenges with other doctors on this platform. They can also access an exclusive digital medical library where they can compare the medicines online and choose the best one for their patient. For a new medicine is not yet available at their location, doctors can connect with the pharma companies for samples through the app, which is a crucial enabler of access to new medicine and reduce dependence on medical representatives. Doctors will be able to share their feedback with the manufacturing companies directly. We are very careful about the security of patient data and other sensitive information that might be available on the app and have robust security measures in place to make it foolproof and reliable," added Bhavesh.