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Brain disorders on rise as India grapples with shortage of neurologists

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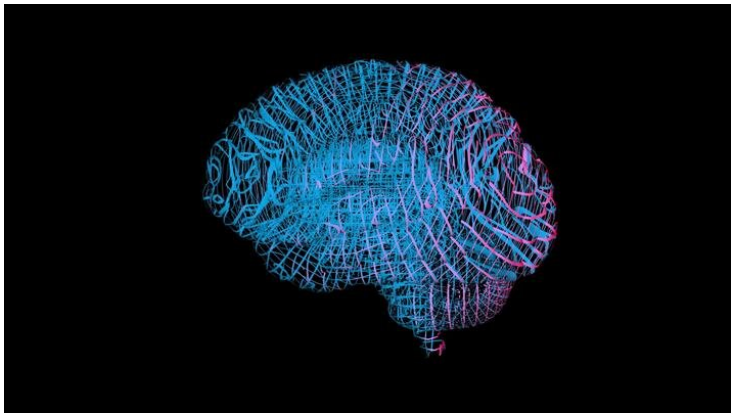
Experts believe that India must urgently invest in specialist training, strengthen neurological services beyond major cities



Neurological disorders are emerging as one of India’s fastest-growing public health challenges, driven by an ageing population and increase in lifestyle diseases. Yet, while the burden of conditions such as stroke, epilepsy, Parkinson’s disease, dementia and multiple sclerosis continues to grow, access to specialised neurological care remains severely uneven, with experts warning that a shortage of neurologists is delaying diagnosis and treatment for millions.

The concern is echoed in the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) Global Status Report on Neurological Disorders (2025), which estimates that more than 40 per cent of the world’s population is living with a neurological condition.

For India, the report paints an equally worrying picture. It notes that the country's neurologist-to-patient ratio is nearly 80 times worse than that of high-income countries, leaving specialised neurological care concentrated in major urban centres.

"Neurological disorders are no longer a concern of a small section of the population -- they are one of the most pressing emerging healthcare challenges of our time," said Dr Madhukar Bhardwaj, Director & Head of Department Neurology, Aakash Healthcare "In a country as vast and diverse as India, with a rapidly ageing population, this is a matter of urgency. What makes the situation even more worrying is the lack of equitable access to care."

Dr. Madhukar noted that many neurological disorders progress silently before symptoms become obvious. "Whether it is stroke, epilepsy, Parkinson’s disease or memory disorders, early diagnosis can significantly improve outcomes. Unfortunately, many patients seek specialist care only after the disease has advanced, either because symptoms are ignored or because neurological services are not easily accessible. Greater public awareness and timely referrals are essential."

According to Dr Neha Kapoor, Associate Director & Head-Neurology, Asian Hospital, "Technology can help to fill gaps of diagnosis and follow-up, in particular through tele-neurology and digital health platforms. But these solutions will have to be better embedded into the public health system to benefit patients across the country."

Experts believe that India must urgently invest in specialist training, strengthen neurological services beyond major cities and integrate brain health into primary healthcare. Without improving access to timely diagnosis and specialist care, they warn, millions of Indians will continue to face preventable disability and diminished quality of life despite advances in medical science.

World Brain Day is observed annually on July 22 to raise global awareness about brain health and neurological disorders, emphasising prevention, access to care, and lifelong brain wellness.