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Economic loss due to deaths in India to increase to 5% of GDP

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At the national level, according to a World Health Organisation (WHO) study, the estimated economic loss for India due to deaths caused by all the diseases in 2005 was 1.3% of its GDP. With an increase in the number of non-communicable diseases, this loss is apprehended to increase to 5% of GDP by 2015 if it is not checked.

Sharing this at the 33rd annual convocation of the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research at Chandigarh, Pranab Mukherjee, President of India said,"Good health of its people is the very foundation of a nation. A person who is not healthy is unable to access opportunities for learning, growth and productive work. In India, a number of rights are guaranteed to its citizens but none of these can be utilized or enforced by persons who are sick, enfeebled and spend their entire energy on treatment and medical care."

He further said, " Our medical healthcare system has to be developed to cater to medical requirements of all sections of society, both in rural and urban areas. A good healthcare system would need to be country-specific, and therefore, India would need to look at achieving universal health coverage based on its own perspective and requirements, while bearing in mind the lessons that can be drawn from the experiences of others. "

Medicines account for 72% of private expenditure of health. India has taken a major decision on distribution of free generic drugs to patients seeking healthcare in public facilities. This will bring down out-of-pocket expenditure and provide affordable access to medicine, particularly for the poor and disadvantaged. Implementing this requires funds as also efficient management systems. In today's era technology based initiatives including telemedicine can be employed to broaden the reach of healthcare.

The Government is looking at scaling up expenditure of health from the current level to 2.5% of GDP by 2017 i.e the end of 12th Plan and 3% by 2022 i.e end of 13th Plan. "The Government, singularly, cannot be a provider of healthcare. While the aim is to strengthen the public healthcare sector, we should look at ways to encourage cooperation between the public and private sectors in achieving the health goals. All stakeholders have to be a part of the effort to provide universal healthcare. From the pharmacists to the doctors, from industry to drug manufacturers, from medical insurance to management of hospitals and running of primary health centres, all have a role in the success of the health system. The potential of India as centre for medical research and innovation given its academic, scientific, technical and industrial capabilities should be fully explored," he added.