

Government launches 'MedTech Mitra': A Strategic Initiative to Empower MedTech Innovators

The Government has launched MedTech Mitra: a strategic initiative to empower MedTech Innovators and advance healthcare solutions. It is a platform that will help the young talents of the country by holding their hands and giving final shape to their research, knowledge, and help them in getting regulatory approval, according to Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya, Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare and Chemicals & Fertilizers as he virtually launched the initiative in the presence of Prof. S.P. Singh Bhagel, Union Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare and Dr. V.K Paul, Member Health, NITI Aayog on 25 Dec 2023. MedTech Mitra is expected to handhold innovators for clinical evaluations and regulatory compliance, empower emerging start-ups, ensure ease of innovation, ease of R&D, and ease of rendering service in building an Atmanirbhar Bharat. It will also foster collaboration amongst stakeholders, effectively break silos, catalyzing growth and independence in this sector.

Underlining the alignment of MedTech Mitra with the medical devices ecosystem as well as boosting the growth and development of health domain, Dr. V.K Paul shared that the platform "will serve to strengthen India's commitment to Universal Health Coverage, further consolidating reach of healthcare services to the innermost corners of the nation to become an integral aspect of Viksit Bharat."





India's hospital chains opt for small-scale expansion

India's prominent hospital chains are shifting their focus to smaller facilities and venturing beyond big cities. This strategic move aims to tap into the booming healthcare market while overcoming challenges like high real estate costs and land scarcity. The trend is driven by several factors. Firstly, patients increasingly prefer specialized, accessible healthcare in the post-pandemic era. Secondly, India's vast population faces a stark shortage of healthcare facilities, particularly in smaller towns and cities. The WHO recommends 3 beds per 1,000 people, but India currently has only 1.3, requiring an estimated 2.4 million additional beds. To address these needs, hospital chains are adopting various strategies. Manipal Health Enterprise, India's second-largest chain, plans to build units with 250-325 beds instead of mega-facilities, catering to specific micro-markets within cities. Additionally, infrastructure issues in large cities, like traffic congestion, are prompting chains like Rainbow to build smaller hospitals closer to patients.

Economic considerations also play a role. Building smaller hospitals on "brownfield" sites, previously developed land, helps hospital chains navigate volatile real estate prices. Furthermore, some healthcare providers are adopting an "asset-light" approach, leasing facilities from developers instead of owning them, a shift that compels commercial property firms to adapt as well.

This strategic shift towards smaller, accessible healthcare facilities in smaller cities and towns positions India's hospital chains for growth while addressing the nation's critical healthcare needs. The future of Indian healthcare seems to lie in specialized, localized care delivered through smaller, more efficient hospitals.



Dr. Mandaviya chairs high-level meeting on new COVID variant surge

On 20th December, a high-level meeting was held by Dr Mansukh Mandaviya, Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare, to discuss the COVID-19 situation in India and preparedness for managing the recent spike in cases of JN.1 variant observed in some states. The meeting highlighted the need for preparedness against new strains, especially during new year festivities. The importance of monitoring emerging cases, symptoms, and case severity was mentioned. India had recorded a single day rise of 628 new Covid-19 cases till December 26, 2023 with one death in Kerala.

States have been requested to ramp up testing and refer samples to INSACOG labs for sequencing. He urged all states to remain alert, increase surveillance, and ensure adequate stock of medical supplies like medicines, oxygen cylinders, ventilators, and vaccines. Conducting mock drills every three months and sharing best practices were also encouraged, along with sharing information on cases, tests, and positivity rate in real-time on the COVID portal was requested for timely monitoring and public health measures. The meeting was briefed on the global and domestic COVID-19 situation. While active cases in India are lower compared to other countries, a steep rise from 115 on December 6th to 614 on the date of the meeting was noted. 92.8% of cases are home isolated, indicating mild illness.

Regarding the new JN.1 variant, it was stated to be under scientific scrutiny but not a cause for immediate concern. No clustering of cases has been observed in India, and most cases so far mild and recovered without complications. Dr Paul reiterated the need for a whole-of-government approach and emphasized ramping up testing and strengthening surveillance systems. Dr Bahl informed about ICMR's work on genome sequencing of the new variant and urged states to increase RT-PCR tests while assuring that there is no cause for panic. State Health Ministers appreciated the support and guidance from the Centre and assured to increase testing and surveillance measures.

AIIMS Delhi co-hosts Global Health Conference in Karnataka

On 10th December 2023, The Global Health Conference 2023 at Sathya Sai Grama, Karnataka, celebrated the achievements of India's first free private rural medical college, the Sri Madhusudan Sai Institute of Medical Sciences and Research (SMSIMSR). Co-hosted by AIIMS New Delhi, the two-day event aimed to foster collaboration for universal healthcare.

Health Minister Dr Mansukh Mandaviya commended SMSIMSR for its contributions to capacity building and last-mile healthcare access. The institute's focus on "role-based" learning and its impact on policymaking were lauded. AIIMS Director Dr M Srinivas emphasized the significance of character and culture in medical education, praising SMSIMSR's model of free treatment and education with a focus on primary and secondary care.

Dr Minu Bajpai, NBEMS Executive Director, proposed SMSIMSR as a National Board exam center and a hub for National Centre for Skill Development, acknowledging the need to increase postgraduate medical intake to address specialist shortages.

Sadguru Sri Madhusudan Sai highlighted the interdependence of individuals, society, and nations in achieving universal healthcare. He urged collaboration between pharmaceutical, healthcare, and technology industries and commended the government's Ayushman Bharath Yojana. SMSIMSR's efficient model of free healthcare with low administrative costs was praised, with a commitment to collaboration for healthcare access, particularly in rural areas. The Global Health Conference 2023 concluded with a renewed commitment to universal healthcare through collaboration and innovation.

Health Minister Dr. Mandaviya propels Viksit Bharat through biotech innovation

Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya, Union Minister for Health & Family Welfare, Government of India, virtually addressed the pre-event summit 'Biotechnology: The Path of Innovation & Wellness for Viksit Bharat' in the presence of Bhupendra Patel, Chief Minister, Gujarat at Vigyan Bhavan, Science City, Ahmedabad, Gujarat on 11th December.

He emphasized that India's 'Bio-Economy' has grown eight times in the last eight years from \$10 billion to \$80 billion. The Indian Biotech Industry is aiming to grow to \$150 billion by 2025 and \$300 billion by 2030. India is currently among the top 12 destinations for Biotechnology in the world with approximately a 3 percent share in the Global Biotechnology Industry.

Dr. Mandaviya further mentioned that the vaccination produced by India during the pandemic showcased India's power in the field of biotechnology to the world. The National Biotechnology Development Strategy 2020-25 provides the government with a platform to strengthen skill development, resources, and innovation converging into one strong ecosystem for knowledge sharing.

Dr. Mandaviya also commended the progress of the nation and industry in this sphere and praised the participation of startups, industries, industry associations, researchers, and academicians across the nation for contributing to the development of this sector. The Gujarat Chief Minister also inaugurated the 'Start-Up Product Launch'.





WHO report highlights climate change's impact on malaria

The World Health Organization's (WHO) 2023 World Malaria Report highlights a concerning rise in malaria cases, reaching 249 million globally in 2022, surpassing pre-pandemic levels. COVID-19 disruptions, drug resistance, climate change impacts, and delayed programs in high-burden countries contribute to the escalating threat. The report explores the nexus between climate change and malaria, emphasizing the role of temperature, humidity, and extreme weather events in mosquito behavior and disease transmission.

Notably, climate change poses a substantial risk to malaria progress, affecting vulnerable regions. Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, stresses the need for sustainable and resilient malaria responses alongside urgent actions to combat global warming. The report also addresses the impact of climate variability on malaria trends, including reduced access to essential services and population displacement.

The COVID-19 pandemic further disrupted malaria services, leading to increased incidence and mortality rates. Five million additional cases in 2022, with Pakistan experiencing a significant surge, contribute to the setback in achieving WHO's global malaria strategy milestones by 2025. Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Regional Director for Africa, emphasizes addressing diverse threats, including limited healthcare access, conflicts, and the aftermath of COVID-19.

Despite challenges, the report highlights positive developments, such as the phased rollout of the RTS,S/AS01 malaria vaccine, showing a substantial reduction in severe malaria. The introduction of a second vaccine, R21/Matrix-M, is expected to enhance supply. Progress towards malaria elimination in low-burden countries is noted, with three countries certified as malaria-free in 2022. The report calls for a significant shift in the malaria fight, emphasizing increased resources, political commitment, data-driven strategies, and innovation, aligning with efforts to mitigate climate change effects. Whole-of-society engagement is deemed crucial for integrated approaches.

New advanced facilities opened at Delhi AIIMS

In October 2022, the Indian government launched the “National Tele Mental Health Programme” to enhance mental health service accessibility. By December 4, 2023, 34 states had established Tele MANAS Cells, managing over 500,000 calls. The government also bolstered mental healthcare at primary levels by upgrading 160,000+ healthcare centers and incorporating mental health services in the Ayushman Arogya Mandir package. Operational guidelines for Mental, Neurological, and substance use disorders were issued.

To overcome manpower shortages, online training for healthcare professionals has been provided since 2018 through Digital Academies. The National Mental Health Programme (NMHP) was implemented, including the District Mental Health Programme (DMHP) in 738 districts, offering outpatient services, counseling, and in-patient care at community and district levels. Support was extended to 25 Centres of Excellence and 47 PG Departments in mental health specialties.

Despite these initiatives, the suicide rate remained at around 12 per lakh population in 2021 and 2022. In response, the government released the National Suicide Prevention Strategy in November 2022, aiming for a 10% reduction in suicide mortality by 2030, providing an action framework for stakeholders. The National Mental Health Survey indicates a 10.6% prevalence of mental disorders in adults over 18. The government’s ongoing and comprehensive efforts reflect a commitment to improving mental health services and addressing challenges faced by individuals and communities.



Nationwide mental health support cell is a huge success with over 5,00,000 calls in 3 months

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