

Healthcare Delivery and Public Private Partnership in Pakistan: Issues, Challenges and Opportunities

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This Editorial may be cited as: Qidwai W. Healthcare Delivery and Public Private Partnership in Pakistan: Issues, Challenges and Opportunities. *J Liaquat Uni Med Health Sci.* 2016;15 (04):162-3. doi: 10.22442/jlumhs.161540485

Pakistan is a developing country with quadruple disease burden. Communicable diseases are still rampant while non-communicable diseases are increasing at a very fast rate. Mental health is deteriorating with a rapid increase in mental diseases. Road traffic accidents are on the rise due to increased communication and transportation. Rising disease burden is seen against the background of scarce resources. Health indicators in Pakistan are lagging behind from other countries of the region.¹ This situation calls to look at innovative strategies to effectively face the challenge of increasing healthcare needs in an efficient and cost effective manner. Looking at public-private partnership models offers opportunities to address the rising disease burden challenge.

Government tries to provide health care services to its people through primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary health care facilities spread all over the country. It delivers health care facilities with a very limited budget. Pakistan spent 2.75% of its GDP on health in 2013, which is much lower than other countries with almost identical income levels. The government contributed about a third of this and the remaining was paid out-of-pocket by citizens at the points of service delivery.²

Currently public-private partnership is not strategically placed to address health care issues. Public sector is trying to provide health care services to its population free of costs. However due to inappropriate allocation of resources and insufficient health care budget, unable to meet its promise of providing free health care services. The healthcare facilities provided by the government lacks proper infrastructure, human resources, essential equipment and medicines.³ The health care delivery system lacks proper referral system and therefore quality of services needs improvement. Primary health care services needs strengthening, hospital based secondary and tertiary care needs to be linked to primary care, if health care system is to be made to make health system functional.⁴

Although government desire is to provide full spectrum of health service to its population, however lack of funds is main hindrance, which causing to deviate from its primary role to regulate medical education and health services. Even it is unable to provide public

health facilities including clean water, sanitation, immunization, maternal and child health services. Medical research is another area that requires government patronage and support.⁵

It is estimated that Private health care sector provides 70% of health care services in Pakistan, with expenditure burden on patients' pocket.² Private sector require proper regulation and legislation. It is common knowledge and understanding that due to lack of government's ability to regulate it effectively, private sector rapidly develops into a health care industry with the prime objective to extract maximum profits. Due to lack of proper government monitoring, patients are then left at the mercy of private sector that can easily exploit them. Quackery is rampant that places life and health of patients at risk.⁶

Better healthcare related outcome can be expected only when primary health care is strong.⁷ Lack of emphasis on primary care has resulted in increased prevalence of preventable diseases.

When primary care is weak the outcome of curative services cannot be optimized, consequently diseases at early stage are missed, diagnosed at a very advanced stage making management more complicated and costly. It is also inappropriate to treat primary care health issues at secondary and tertiary levels, as they are not geared to handle such issues, resulting in adverse health outcomes and reduced patient and health care provider satisfaction. It is therefore desirable that Private sector should be encouraged to provide primary care services in the country with proper government regulation.

It is suggested that government should increase its health care services budget. Since education and social sector development is shown to have favorable impact on health¹, it is also recommended that budget for these sectors should also be increased. Improved governance, while using limited available resources, is also need of the hour.

Government should avoid providing health care services directly but rather allow private sector to do so. There should be a proper incentive for the private sector but with stringent regulations. Government should also focus on better regulating medical education and postgraduate training in various medical disciplines.

Currently medical education has become very expensive and medical colleges need more teaching faculty to better educate health care providers for the country. Government also needs to focus more on patronizing medical research to improve quality of medical care being provided to its people. Government need to spend more on providing public health facilities including clean water, proper sanitation, immunization, mother and child services.

It's time that government redefines its role and that of private sector to improve health of its people. Improvement in health of its people cannot be anticipated without major strategic changes how public and private sector should work together in the interest of better health care in the country.

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