IMA stresses on the importance of reviving family physicians

The need is imminent in the wake of a rising shortage of doctors, establishments, and beds in the country

New Delhi, 26th June 2017: According to statistics, India has one doctor for every 1700 people against the WHO recommended norm of 1 doctor for every 1,000 people. With a population of more than a billion, India is facing a shortage of doctors, establishment and beds. There are not enough doctors to take care of the health needs of all. Adding to this, is the issue of unqualified quacks who dupe people in the name of medical practice.

Research shows that about 80% of the population in India turns to private caregivers and more than 75% of their health care spending is out of their own pocket. All this makes it imperative to bring back the concept of a 'family physician'. Family doctors can help restore the faith of patients in medical professionals, which currently is seeing a downward trend.

Speaking about this, Padma Shri Awardee Dr K K Aggarwal, National President Indian Medical Association (IMA) and President Heart Care Foundation of India (HCFI) and Dr RN Tandon – Honorary Secretary General IMA in a joint statement, said, "In earlier days, family physicians looked after all the health needs of a family, even many generations of a family, regardless of their specialization. They treated and provided preventive health care to a family as a whole because they were aware of the family history and served as a link between the patient and the specialist. The situation is different today: lack of communication has fostered distrust among patients which is evident in the form of rising litigations or often violence against doctors. The need of the hour, therefore, is to reintroduce the family physician system. They are the first link in health care delivery for the population and play a pivotal role in preventive health, early diagnosis, and timely referral including maintaining health details of all family members."

A physician should be aware of the social determinants of health such as the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, for good health outcomes. An organized chain of qualified family doctors will help in substantially easing the burden on large hospitals by detecting primary-stage ailments, and reducing cases that require complicated procedures. The society should be educated on the benefits of getting treatment through a family doctor.

Adding further, Dr Aggarwal, said, "Family physicians offer several advantages. Some of them are familiarity, trust, and ease of communication. As a result, the patient is more likely to open up about his/her problems and adhere to the treatment prescribed. Family physicians provide a continuum of care at all levels of care, including emergency care. While specialization is required
today keeping in mind the medical advancements, the psychological impact of a family doctor on the patients is invaluable, particularly due to the stressful and busy life people lead today.”

As part of its efforts to update the older lot of general practitioners (aged 45 years and above) with the latest medical advancements, the IMA is already offering a series of continuing medical education programmes with short courses in diabetes, ECG, oncology, etc. to keep them abreast of the latest developments. It is important to encourage more practitioners to undertake the diploma courses in family medicine so that they no longer deal with mundane and routine health issues.

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About IMA: Indian Medical Association is the only representative, national voluntary organization of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine, which looks after the interest of doctors as well as the well being of the community at large. It has its Headquarter in Delhi and State / Terr. Branches in 30 States and Union Territories. It has over 2, 60,000 doctors as its members through more than 1765 active local branches spread across the country.

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