Urgent need to address the doctor-patient ratio in India

*This will ensure adequate consultation time for each patient and avoid a possible burnout*

**New Delhi, 12 November 2017:** As per a recent study, the average time that primary care consultants in India spend with patients is only about two minutes. This is in contrast with first-world countries where the consultation crosses a duration of 20 minutes. A short consultation time not only affects patient care adversely but also increases the workload and stress of the consulting physician. The IMA says the results show up in the form of spending more at pharmacies, overusing antibiotics, and sharing a poor relationship with doctors.

There has been a paradigm shift in the thinking of the public. There has been a corresponding paradigm shift in the dynamics of doctor-patient relationship; from paternalism to patient-centric. Today, patients want to be equal partners in decisions about their treatment with the doctor acting as a guide and facilitate decision making. Patient autonomy is also now at the forefront of the principles of medical ethics.

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 India, there still exists a huge disparity between the number of patients and the primary care physicians. As a result, patients get less time with the doctors. Overcrowded OPDs means doctors end up attending to two or three patients at the same time. This can compromise the quality of care given and a loss of faith in the doctors as well. Indians also have a peculiar notion about who a good doctor is. There is a belief here that the best doctor is one who charges a lesser amount but is also available round the clock, which is not practical. Then there are also doctors who charge less in the hope of getting more patients. All of this leads to a shorter consultation time, because a doctor cannot keep working endlessly."

Burnout among doctors due to factors such as these is an important issue in healthcare and affects both the doctor and patients adversely. A doctor suffering this condition may lack empathy towards the patients or even have an impaired judgement.
Adding further, Dr Aggarwal, said, “The cases of burnout are likely higher in female doctors due to the demands at both work and home. The number of specialists is limited, and hence they are subjected to more working hours and the nature of the jobs is demanding. With such a punishing workload, they may also end up taking the blame if something goes wrong or even become frustrated with the changing work culture. Addressing the doctor-patient ratio in India is, therefore, an urgent need of the hour.”

Here are some tips for doctors to avoid a possible burnout.

- Practice smart work scheduling
- Start a hobby which will help you distract yourself from the regular workload
- Make time for relaxing techniques such as yoga and meditation, as these will prove to be stressbusters.
- Make time for family and friends
- Delegate tasks and try to manage your time effectively.

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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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