



In a democracy the function of the government is to look after the welfare of the people. This could be through the provision of health, education, employment, housing or the development of roads, providing clean drinking water, electricity, etc. Generally health means the ability of people to remain free of illnesses, diseases and injuries. But the word 'health' conveys a more positive concept than mere absence of disease. We are healthy if we are **active** and **in good spirits** in whatever we may do. It is not healthy to be dull, inactive, anxious or scared for long stretches of time. We all need to be without mental strain. All these aspects are a part of health. There are other factors also that affect our health. For example, people require a pollution free environment and clean drinking water to remain healthy. On the other hand if people do not get adequate food or starve, it will lead to illness.

Those who are poor are in the first place undernourished. These families are not eating as much as they should. They are not provided basic necessities like clean surroundings, balanced diet (having all the elements required by the body), clean drinking water, adequate housing, etc. Therefore, they are more likely to fall ill. The expenses on illness make their situation even worse. Moreover, women generally are not taken to a doctor in a prompt manner. Many rural areas have few health centres and they do not run properly. Even private health services are not available.


Health care is based on health education. Health education is a part of education but not all its aspects are taught in a proper way. That is why people are not aware about the concepts of balanced diet, body hygiene, safe or clean drinking water, clean environment, etc.

Health Care in India

In India, it is often said that the government is unable to provide health services for all because it does not have enough money and facilities. But the government has a wide network of health centres,



Healthy children



hospitals, blood banks, laboratories for testing, ambulances, etc. India has the largest number of medical colleges in the world and is among the largest producers of doctors. Approximately 15,000 new doctors qualify every year from these colleges. In 1950, there were only 2717 hospitals in India. In 1991, there were 11,174 hospitals. In 2000, the number grew to 18,218. From many countries people come for treatment in some of the hospitals in India that compare with the best in the world and cheaper. India is the fourth largest producer of medicines in the world and is also a large exporter of medicine.

But about five lakh people die from tuberculosis every year. This number is almost unchanged since independence. Almost two million cases of malaria are reported every year and this number is not decreasing. The reason behind the situation is that in the first case, most of the doctors settle in urban areas to earn and prosper. They do not like to go to the villages for the lack of facilities like clean drinking water, regular supply of electricity, clean environment, etc. which is the reason for people falling often ill too. The rural people cannot pay more to the doctors. The medicines are too expensive. All the medicines could not be sold in India. They are exported for more profit. Only few hospitals are compared with the best in the world but the rest especially the government hospitals are not managed well because they have to deal with a large number of poor patients seeking free services and free medicines.




*Doctor examining the patients
in government hospital*

Public Health Services

Public health services are meant for all people in the country and are mainly organised by the government almost free or in some cases at low cost. The public health service is a chain of health centres and hospitals run by the government — central, state or local. They are linked together so that they cover both rural and urban areas and can also provide treatment to all kinds of problems from common illnesses to special diseases. Public health care services form the backbone of health care in India. These hospitals provide health care facilities such as diagnosis and treatment of diseases, conducting essential tests and providing medicines.

At the village level there are health centres where there is usually a nurse and a village health worker. They are trained in dealing with common illnesses. A Primary Health Centre covers many villages in a rural area. Its doctors also supervise the work of the village health workers. At the district level, there is one District Hospital. It also supervises all the health centres. Large cities have many government hospitals in which few are specialised hospitals. In rural areas, a jeep is often used to serve as a mobile clinic for patients.

Public health system provides quality health care services either free or at a low cost, so that even the poor can get treatment. Another very essential and important function of public health system is to take action to prevent the spread of diseases such as tuberculosis, polio,



malaria, jaundice, dengue, cholera, chikungunia, etc. For example, pulse polio campaign by the government on certain Sundays is known as 'Polio Day'. On these Sundays all the children below the age of 5 years are given polio drops orally free of cost by the health workers all over the country. Prejudice prevents some people to let their children get polio drops. Without the participation of people the government campaigns for health could not be effective. To prevent malaria and dengue, health workers go door to door to inspire people to see that mosquitoes do not breed in drains, water coolers, roof tops, etc. Many people are following the instructions but some are careless despite efforts of the health workers.

In order to fulfill its commitment of providing health care to all citizens, the government has established hospitals and health centres. The money spent on health services comes from us, the public, as taxes paid to the government. For example, every time we purchase a commodity, a certain percentage is charged as government tax. The government must safeguard the Right to Life of every person. If the medical staff of a hospital refuses or does not provide timely medical treatment to a person, it means that this protection of life is not being given. If a person is denied treatment at a government hospital, he/she can file a case in the court for justice and the court will ask the State Government to pay him/her the money spent on treatment in private hospitals.

Private Health Facilities

Urban areas have large number of doctors that run their own private clinics. Many of them provide specialised services. There are hospitals and nursing homes that are privately owned. There are many laboratories that do tests and offer special facilities such as X-ray, ultrasound etc. There are also medical shops from where one can buy medicines. Now there are large companies that run hospitals to earn profits. Some companies manufacture and sell medicines for profit. Private health facilities are not owned or controlled by the government. In private facilities, patients have to pay a lot of money for every service that they use. Thus private doctors and hospitals are more expensive. Only the rich can afford them. But they give all facilities, quick attention and care for the money spent. In rural areas, one finds only Registered Medical Practitioners. They can treat only common illnesses. Often the villagers have to go to cities for specialised services.

Healthcare and Equality

In India, private health services are increasing but public services are not. These private services are available in urban areas. As the services are run for profit, the cost of these services is rather high. Even then both urban and rural people prefer to pay and seek the high quality services provided by private doctors than use free treatment of public health centres. There are many reasons such as better medical attention and cleaner environment. Even those who are poor

go to private clinics and hospitals in the hope of better treatment and faster recovery. Often they have to borrow money or even sell their belongings to bear the medical expenses. Taking advantage of the situation some private health service providers prescribe unnecessary tests, medicines, injections or saline glucose bottles when tablets or simple medicines can suffice. This they do to earn more and more money.

The problem gets complex as poor people usually suffer from hunger and malnutrition (lack of proper food). They tend to fall sick repeatedly. Poor sanitation facilities, pollution and unsafe drinking water make the situation worse.

Thus, adequate health care is not available to all citizens in India.

Responsibility of the Government

It is the responsibility of the government to provide quality healthcare services to all its citizens, especially the poor and the disadvantaged. However, health is as much dependent on basic amenities— balanced diet, clean drinking water, clean environment and good economic conditions of the people as it is on health care services. Prevention is better than cure. Basic amenities will help prevent the illnesses and diseases. So the government must work on both— prevention and cure— to improve the health condition of all the citizens. In 1996, the government of Kerala state in India gave forty per cent of the entire state budget to the panchayats to provide for the basic amenities— food, water, education and women’s development. Health centres were also improved. Their effort is going on and the shortage of doctors, medicines and hospital beds is being dealt with.



Beds at the General ward of a hospital

The Government of Costa Rica, a country in South America decided not to have an army. It spent the money which was earlier used on army, on health education and other basic needs of the people — nutrition, safe drinking water, sanitation, housing and hospitals. Costa Rica is now considered to be one of the healthiest countries in South America.

Key Words

- » Health : ability of people to remain free of illnesses, diseases, injuries and mental strain.
- » Public Facility : an activity or service that is meant for all people in the country and is mainly organised by the government such as hospitals, schools, etc.
- » Private Facility : an activity or service organised by an individual or company for their own profit.
- » Basic amenities : clean surroundings, balanced diet, clean drinking water, adequate housing etc.
- » Balanced diet : a diet having all the elements required by the body.
- » Undernourished : persons not getting all the elements required by the body.
- » Hygienic or Sanitation : cleanliness of body and environment .

SUMMARY

- ▶ We are healthy if we are active and in good spirits in whatever we do.
- ▶ The poor are undernourished and they are not provided basic amenities like clean surroundings, balanced diet, clean drinking water, adequate housing, etc.
- ▶ Health care is based on the education of all the aspects of health.
- ▶ The Government in India has a wide network of health centres, hospitals, blood banks, laboratories for testing, ambulances, etc.
- ▶ About 15,000 new doctors qualify every year but most of them settle in urban areas.
- ▶ The Government hospitals are not managed well because they have to deal with a large number of poor patients seeking free services and free medicines.
- ▶ Public health services are meant for all people in the country and are mainly organised by the government almost free or in some cases, at low cost.
- ▶ Public health system also takes action to prevent the spread of diseases such as tuberculosis, polio, malaria, jaundice, dengue, cholera, chikungunia, etc.
- ▶ If the medical staff of a hospital refuses or does not provide timely medical treatment to a person, he/she can file a case in the court which can ask the government to pay the money spent on treatment in private hospitals.
- ▶ There are private hospitals, nursing homes, testing laboratories, specialised services run by companies for earning profit.
- ▶ Rich and poor both go to private clinics and hospitals in the hope of better treatment and fast recovery.
- ▶ Often the poor have to borrow money or even sell their belongings to bear the medical expenses.
- ▶ Many times the private health service providers prescribe unnecessary tests, medicines, injections or saline glucose bottles when tablets or simple medicine can suffice.
- ▶ Health is as much dependent on basic amenities —balanced diet, clean drinking water, clean environment and good economic conditions of the people as it is on health care services.


Exercise Time

A. Tick (✓) the only correct choice amongst the following :

1. It means the ability of people to remain free of illnesses diseases and injuries _____.
a. Education b. Employment c. Health d. Electricity
2. In 1950, there were only _____ hospitals in India.
a. 2717 b. 11,174 c. 18,218 d. 21,124
3. _____ areas have large number of doctors that run their own private clinics.
a. Urban b. Rural c. Private d. Public
4. In rural areas, a _____ is often used to serve as a mobile clinic for patients.
a. car b. bus c. van d. jeep
5. All the children below the age of _____ years are given polio drops orally free of cost .
a. four b. five c. six d. seven

B. Fill in the blanks :

1. It is not _____ to be dull, inactive, anxious or scared for long stretches of time.
2. Public health service is a chain of health centres and hospitals run by the _____.
3. Village health workers can treat _____ illnesses.

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- Urban areas have _____ number of doctors.
 - Adequate health care is not available to _____ citizens in India.

C. Match the Following :

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| 1. New doctors like | a. meant for all, organised by government |
| 2. Public facilities | b. having all the elements required by the body |
| 3. Private facilities | c. urban areas |
| 4. Balanced diet | d. active and in good spirits |
| 5. Healthy | e. organised by an individual or company |

D. Write true (T) or False (F) against the following statements in given brackets :

- Health means only to remain free of illnesses, diseases and injuries.
- The undernourished poor people are likely to fall ill.
- Women generally are not taken to a doctor in a prompt manner.
- Most people are aware about the concepts of balanced diet.
- Health services in India are cheaper than other countries.

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E. Define the following terms :

- Health
- Balanced diet
- Basic amenities
- Hygiene

F. Answer in one word or one phrase :

- Where do the new doctors like to settle ?
- How much area does a primary health centre cover ?
- Who supervises the health centres in a district ?
- From where the money to run government hospitals come ?
- On which two things the government should work to improve the health condition of all the citizens ?

G. Answer these questions briefly :

- What are the different aspects of health ?
- Why are the poor people more likely to fall ill ?
- Describe the network of public health services in a district.
- Why do the new doctors avoid the rural areas ?
- Write a note on 'private health care facilities'.

H. Answer these questions in detail :

- What are the differences between private and public health services ?
- 'The Indian government is yet to provide quality health care facilities to all citizens'. Justify the statement.

PROJECT WORK

- Visit the private and public health services in your area and compare and contrast with respect to the cost of the services, availability of services, care, etc.