

THE CURRENT STANDING OF INDIAN HEALTHCARE AND THE PHARMACIST

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ABSTRACT

India is a large country and is ranked as the second most populous nation in the world. It is difficult to ensure the upkeep and effective operation of healthcare systems in a nation with such a large population. Recent surveys and reports from around the world indicate that India does not have a healthy health index. According to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the health index of some southern Indian states such as Kerala, Tamilnadu, and Telangana is good, while the health index of some northern Indian states such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh is poor. The healthcare systems in India face a number of challenges, such as a lack of awareness, a lack of access to healthcare, a shortage of healthcare professionals, high treatment costs, and a lack of accountability. Pharmacists have sufficient knowledge and skills to educate people and the general public about treatment, diagnosis, prevention, and mitigation of health problems. They are able to provide patients with sound advice in a variety of areas, including the appropriate use of medications, dietary recommendations, communicable and non-communicable diseases, pathogens and diseases related to them, and more. By involving pharmacists in health awareness programmes, patient counselling, and eradication programmes, one of the options available to raise the health index is to reduce the number of preventable illnesses. In this manner, those in need and those living in poverty, whether they are located in an urban or rural setting, will have access to medical care. The current health index of India, the challenges faced by Indian healthcare systems, and the ways in which pharmacists can contribute to the improvement of healthcare systems were all examined and discussed in this study.

KEYWORDS: Health index of India, Ranking of Indian states in health index, Challenges of Indian healthcare systems, Role of pharmacists in improving health index.

INTRODUCTION

The global healthcare security (GHS) index evaluates the ability of nations to gather information in advance of diseases and pandemics. With a score of 42.8 and a change of -0.8 from 2019, India received a ranking of 66 out of 195 nations in the GHS Index 2021 report and data.^[1] India received a health index score of 67.1 in

2021, placing it 101st out of 157 countries in the world according to the rating of health and health systems.^[2] According to the health index published by Ministry of health and family welfare in association with Niti Ayog and The World bank, the ranking of different states of India in the year 2019-20 is given in table 1 below.

Table 1: Ranks of larger states, smaller states and union territories in the year 2019-20.^[3]

Larger states (19) excluding West Bengal)		Smaller states (08)		Union territories (07) excluding Ladakh	
Rank	State	Rank	State	Rank	UT
1	Kerala	1	Mizoram	1	Dadra & Nagar haveli and Daman & Diu
2	Tamilnadu	2	Tripura	2	Chandigarh
3	Telangana	3	Sikkim	3	Lakshadweep
4	Andhra Pradesh	4	Goa	4	Puducherry
5	Maharashtra	5	Meghalaya	5	Delhi
6	Gujarat	6	Manipur	6	Jammu & Kashmir
7	Himachal Pradesh	7	Arunachal Pradesh	7	Andaman and Nicobar
8	Punjab	8	Nagaland		
9	Karnataka				
10	Chhattisgarh				
11	Haryana				

12	Assam				
13	Jharkhand				
14	Odisha				
15	Uttarakhand				
16	Rajasthan				
17	Madhya Pradesh				
18	Bihar				
19	Uttar Pradesh				

Five "A" explains the challenges in Indian healthcare system

1. Awareness (Lack): How aware is the Indian population of health issues that are important to them? Two studies found that only one-third of pregnant women knew enough about how to breastfeed to do it right. A study of adolescent girls in urban Haryana found that only 11.3% knew the right information about key reproductive health issues. A review article on geriatric morbidity found that 20.3% of the people who took part knew what caused common illnesses and how to avoid them. Why does the Indian population not know much about health? There may be many reasons for this, such as a low level of education, low functional literacy, a lack of emphasis on education in the healthcare system and a low priority on health among the population. What's encouraging is that most efforts to raise people's awareness have led to positive results. A review of the effectiveness of interventions on the reproductive health of adolescents showed that girls became much more aware of health problems, environmental health, nutrition and their children's health after interventions. The message is clear: we need to try to make those we work with more aware, and we need to get younger people to believe in the power of education to change behaviour.

2. Access (Lack): The Oxford dictionary says that "access" to healthcare means "the right or chance to use or benefit from" healthcare. How much access does our population have to good healthcare? is a very important one. A paper from 2002 says that "access" depends on things like the availability, supply and use of health care services. Even in places where services are "available" they may not be used as much as they could be because of financial, organisational, social and cultural barriers. Physical reach is one of the most important factors that determine access, which is defined as "the ability to get to a health care facility within 5 km of where you live or work." Using this definition, a 2012 study in India found that only 37% of people in rural areas could get to in-patient facilities within 5 km, while 68% could get to out-patient facilities. In 2012, Krishna and Ananthapur said that in general, the farther away from towns someone lives and the more rural their life is, the more likely they are to get sick, go hungry, get weak, and die young. Even if a health care centre is physically easy to get to, how good is the care it gives? Is this care available all the time? As people who think about community medicine and public health, we need to encourage people to talk about what makes access to

health care possible. We should find and analyse possible access barriers in the financial, geographical, social and system-related areas of getting good healthcare.

3. Absence (Crisis of manpower): When talking about how to provide health care, it's important to talk about the people who do the work. Do we have enough people, have they been properly trained, are they spread out evenly and do they have a good attitude about doing their jobs? The workforce is not spread out in the best way, since most people prefer to work in places with better infrastructure and more opportunities for family life and growth. Even though most of the money spent on health care in the country comes from the private sector, the state-run health sector is still the only choice for many people in rural and near-urban areas. People are less likely to look for health care when there isn't a qualified person at the point of delivery after they have travelled a long way to get there. Since most health care services are provided by the private sector, there have been many programmes that try to use private expertise to give public health care services. The newest idea is the new nationwide plan to accredit private providers to provide services that the government will pay for. In an ideal world, this should lead to better coverage, but does it also mean that the public health system isn't good enough? It's time to make a policy on health human power that every Indian is cared for by a sensitive, trained and skilled healthcare worker.

4. Affordability (Cost): How much does health care cost in India and more importantly, how many people can pay for it? In India, everyone knows that the private sector is the most important player in health care. Almost 75% of healthcare costs come out of people's own pockets and high healthcare costs are a major reason why people are poor. The problem is made worse by the lack of rules in the private sector, which means that the quality and cost of services vary. The public sector offers low-cost or free health care but it is seen as unreliable and of average quality, so it is usually not the first choice unless someone can't pay for private care. Local and national efforts can solve the problem of how to make health care more affordable. Nationally, the government needs to spend more on health, this will give the rural and poor areas a much-needed boost to their infrastructure and hopefully, make it easier for people to get the services, facilities of health care. Everyone in the health care system needs to be aware of costs. Wasteful spending, options that cost a lot and tests/procedures that aren't needed should be avoided.

5. Accountability (Lack): Accountability has been defined as the steps and processes that one party uses to explain and take responsibility for its actions. People in the health care field are responsible to give the patients best service they deserve. There may also be a spiritual or religious dimension.

The health of the people in our great country is at risk because of the five problems listed above. Let's be aware of these and other challenges and get ready to face them, keeping in mind that the fight against illness is the fight against everything that is bad for humanity.^[4]

Pharmacist and its role

According to pharmacy Act 1948, "A registered pharmacist is a person whose name is currently on the list of pharmacists in the state where he or she lives or where he or she is currently practising or running a pharmacy business." What does the term "pharmacist" refer to? Table 2 below tells about the meaning of each alphabet used in the word Pharmacist.

Table 2: Expansion of each alphabet used in the word Pharmacist.

1	P	Patience	6	A	Administrator
2	H	Honesty	7	C	Courageous
3	A	Alertness	8	I	Intelligent
4	R	Research	9	S	Studious
5	M	Motivator	10	T	Thinker

Mission: "The patient receives the appropriate medication at the appropriate time, in the appropriate quantity and in the appropriate manner". It is evident that medicine has been manufactured by the specialised individual whom we refer to as a pharmacist. Humans have basic needs for food, clothing and shelter but today's greatest basic requirement is medicine. According to a 1963 discussion at a British pharmaceutical conference, a pharmacist is regarded as an expert on drugs and that "without medicine there is no life, it acts as Sanjivani for human beings." Such medications are created by pharmacists, who are also the first person in the health care system.

The field of pharmacy as a whole: In the form of patient interactions, pharmacists are able to reflect on all facets of society.

Artist – Designer of drug dosage form

Lawyer – having a basic understanding of drug laws and regulations

Engineer - being technically knowledgeable

Entrepreneur - with strong managerial, accounting, marketing and counselling skills

Health professional - having adequate knowledge of health.^[5]

Nearly 70% of the population in India lacks access to vital pharmaceuticals for a variety of reasons including the lack of health experts and inappropriate professional advice regarding the use of drugs. The current number of pharmacists in India can contribute significantly to the improvement of drug accessibility and safe use.

Worldwide, pharmacists are the third largest group of healthcare workers. The majority of pharmacists in India work in community settings which are the first point of interaction between community members and healthcare. The role of pharmacists should undergo a significant shift that will help fill the gaps in healthcare and significantly contribute to national health efforts. Even while pharmacists play a crucial role in providing improved healthcare, it is sad that the majority of patients do not distinguish between a grocery store clerk and a pharmacist. To provide improved health care, it is imperative that pharmacists become an integral component of the healthcare system.

The contribution of pharmacists to the improvement of healthcare in India

In the following sectors of healthcare provision across the country, the participation of pharmacists has the potential to play an important role:

i. Medications should be used correctly

In situations where it is necessary, a pharmacist is able to provide the patient with counselling to provide advice on the proper use of medications as well as information on how they should be stored. By educating patients on how to make appropriate use of medications and maintaining sound pharmacy practises, a pharmacist has the potential to play an indispensable role in the provision of healthcare. Pharmacists take the time to educate patients about the medications that have been prescribed to them can considerably boost a patient's level of awareness regarding the appropriate application of medications from 56% to 90%.

The current workforce of pharmacists in India has the potential to make a significant contribution toward enhancing both access to medications and the safe administration of those medications.

ii. Dietary advice

Community pharmacists have the potential to become an excellent resource for ensuring that patients receive adequate nutrition by advising patients on their fundamental dietary requirements, helping children break unhealthy eating habits, recommending a special diet for those who suffer from food allergies or diabetes and taking part in campaigns held in rural areas to educate people about the importance of maintaining healthy and well-balanced diets. To ensure that patients have a better overall state of health, pharmacists can disseminate information such as the reduced risk of stroke among fish

eaters, the potential for symptoms of hypervitaminosis to disrupt menstrual cycles, the potential for Nutraceuticals and dietary supplements to provide a wide range of health benefits and much more.

iii. Educating individuals regarding sexually transmitted diseases

According to the most recent information that the government has released in 2019, it is projected that there were approximately 23.49 lakh persons living with HIV/AIDS (PLHIV) in India in 2019. Antiretroviral therapy is a treatment for HIV that comes at a high price and is out of reach for a sizeable section of the world's population. Pharmacists can contribute to the fight against HIV/AIDS by increasing public awareness and disseminating information on the virus, its mode of transmission, risk factors and various preventative strategies.

iv. Drug therapy customization

One of the most important developments in contemporary medical practise is something called "personalization of medication therapy" which can also be explained as the process of tailoring a patient's drug selection and dosage to their specific needs. A patient can receive counselling from a pharmacist in situations where a physician is too busy on topics such as drug information, Pharmaco-economics and alternative therapy, moral support and so on. Pharmacist is able to retain the specifics of the patient's medical history including any allergies and other information that may be relevant to the treatment which makes it possible to execute the notion of individualization in drug therapy.

How might pharmacists participate more in healthcare?

Pharmacists can help fill healthcare shortages and provide a platform for professional development in India due to a shortage of medical professionals and poorly qualified providers. Pharmacists should learn programme development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation to effectively manage community health. Implementation science is being used to understand how to apply evidence to public health challenges including drug safety and mobile health as technology and innovation improve. Implementation research can offer the government with data to integrate pharmacists into public health care. Pharmacists will need to understand how and why pharmacy services may improve the health and well-being of individuals in resource-limited situations as they enter public health. Dual-trained pharmacists and public health experts are needed. A few Indian pharmacy universities offer Pharm.D./MPH dual degree programmes, although most pharmacy students just briefly learn about public health. Only a few pharmacy courses focus on public health and few textbooks do so. Thus, Pharmacists need public health and Pharmacoepidemiology studies in pharmacy school.^[6]

CONCLUSION

In the context of healthcare in India, there is a lack of utilisation of both community pharmacy practise and pharmacies in general. At most cases, pharmacists who are employed in community pharmacies do not offer patient counselling services to their customers. In order to acknowledge the important role that pharmacists play in delivering higher-quality medical care, the government and various health organisations need to collaborate closely with the associations of pharmacists, during which they should discuss their shared experiences, as well as draught appropriate guidelines. Since pharmacists are involved in every aspect of the society's health and the construction of an excellent health care system, they must continually strive to expand their expertise while adhering to ethical standards. Therefore, pharmacists are the one and only highly skilled medical practitioners who serve as the backbone of the nation's health care system. This helps to ensure that the nation's health care system remains strong.

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The author declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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