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Bringing stakeholders of health provisioning on one platform can make it UPI of health sector, says Dr RS Sharma

Our Bureau, Mumbai

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UPI has become an extremely successful and scalable platform. It is a simple single dimension money transfer system. Health provisioning has hundreds and thousands of stakeholders - small clinics, large hospitals, technology savvy hospitals, pharmacies, diagnosticians and laboratories. It is a diverse ecosystem. All these have to be brought on one platform for it to become the UPI of the health sector, according to Dr Ram Sewak Sharma, chief executive officer, National Health Authority (NHA), Union ministry of health & family welfare.

Speaking at the Public Affairs Forum of India (PAFI)'s 8th National Forum that was held virtually today, on "Reviving the Economy: Reimagine. Reboot. Reform", Dr Sharma explained that technology in the health sector has to be inclusive, cater to diversity, interoperable, scalable, frugal, user-friendly, not become an additional burden on a doctor's part and easy to integrate in the workflow. Above all, it should be people-centric.

Citing how carefully privacy of people is taken care of, he added, "Privacy by design principles have been followed ever since Aadhar was introduced. Minimal information, consent-based sharing of information, purpose specific information, notice to a total of nine principles are being followed for NDHM as well."

In conclusion, he highlighted the need to devise an open platform where there are necessary artefacts in terms of digital public goods; it will be a protocol-based network where people can plug in their solutions; and the search will be neutral.

Speaking at the PAFI's 8th National Forum, Dr Randeep Guleria, director, AIIMS advocated, "Health has become the centre stage. The pandemic has shown us that if the nation is unhealthy, it will affect the economy, tourism, travel and other sectors. We have to come out of silos and start collaborating just as people started manufacturing essentials such as PPE kits, N95 masks, ventilators etc. during Covid-19."

Highlighting the importance of technology in health, he further added, "Technology, if used properly, can be a game changer. Tele-consultation is safe, cost-effective, ensures easy transfer of data and has the strength of managing large numbers of patients remotely. It has changed how conferences were held in healthcare. We have to adapt to technology as per the needs of the health sector."

He also cited the need to address health as equity and invest more in research and entrepreneurship. A well-structured adequately-financed PPP plan, he feels, can become a defining moment for the health sector.

Shobana Kamineni, executive vice chairperson, Apollo Hospitals said, "NDHM will be transformative. When it talks about safety, interoperability, security and reliability as the four pillars, it stands a chance as a National Health Stack. NDHM has to be such an important mission that everyone understands it. We need to have a series of discussions highlighting how it is going to be transformative, non-threatening and we need people to trust the NDHM and realise its importance. We are in the first step of creating believers. This is a movement just like cell phones."

She further added, "In two to three years, we will start discussing where we are and how many things are transformed. Unless the NDHM puts up guardrails, we will see a situation that is detrimental to the sector. A situation worse than not having inadequate healthcare, is doing it the wrong way. I am really proud of the 100 crore vaccination. We will continue to do what keeps India safe."

Lastly, Dr Manjiri Bakre, founder & CEO, OncoStem Diagnostics said, "As entrepreneurs, we develop products which can fit in our healthcare system. Taking lead from the United States, we need a ready infrastructure where the products can be used. The ABDM and NDHM provide such an infrastructure to us. In such an infrastructure-ready scenario, entrepreneurs can really focus upon developing infrastructure-friendly products. I really look forward to developing more products and helping India as a country."

Deepshikha Dharmaraj, managing committee member, PAFI and chief executive officer, Genesis BCW Member, BCW India Board introduced the session and shared how India's one billion vaccine milestone reiterates the strength of India's healthcare sector and the spirit of partnership between the government and industry while the session was moderated by Anil Padmanabhan.

Vote of thanks was presented by Neelima Dwivedi, managing committee member, PAFI and senior director – public policy, corporate communications & market access, MSD Pharmaceuticals Pvt Ltd.

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