GAUTAM
MUKHOPADHYAY

INTRODUCTION

The inadequacy of government health care in Bengal has led to a rapid growth of corporate hospitals. However, only less than 5 per cent of the population can afford corporate healthcare. The huge number of patients in government hospitals has left the system gasping. In the 90s, the number of corporate hospitals was very few and smaller establishments (nursing homes) were the main treatment centres for the middle class.

NURSING HOMES VS CORPORATES

The upper middle class found better service and affordable care in nursing homes than in government hospitals. The lower middle class would go to nursing homes after being refused immediate care in the government sector because of very high workload. These smaller establishments provided the very needed personal care at affordable cost. However, they lacked infrastructure. This paved the way for the growth of corporate hospitals.

THE CORPORATE CONCEPT

By the mid-90s, there was a gradual influx of the large corporate houses in the health sector. The concept was to provide quality health care at an affordable cost with adequate infrastructure.

It took about 10 years for the gradual decay of the nursing home sector as the corporate filled up the void. The common people opted for better infrastructure at about the same cost. Prior to the 90s, many senior doctors had their smaller personal establishments which gradually closed down because of poor occupancy and government apathy. Rules became more stringent and the nursing homes failed to comply with them. The change of guard in Bengal’s healthcare had far-reaching consequences in the next two decades.

CORPORATES VS GOVT

There is often comparison between government and private health care. This is unfair because government is a welfare organisation, where profit is not at all an issue.

In contrast, the corporate concept is purely a profit-and-loss statement. Any segment of a corporate hospital which is not profitable is replaced. Doctors who cannot provide expected revenue tend to get sidelined with time.

In the hot pursuit of revenue generation, corporates have lost track of many issues which are of prime importance. The doctor-patient relationship tends to get diluted with the advent of the corporate machinery. The doctors have hardly much say in either administrative or financial issues.

The target-based revenue generation concept has added growth to corporate hospitals over the years. However, it needs to be assessed whether the common person has really gained.

CORPORATES VS CORPORATES

The last decade has seen a very unusual battle emerging between the corporates — the marketing saga. The law does not permit doctors to advertise or market themselves. The corporates, however, are not guided by such regulations.

This has led to a bitter battle between corporates to establish their respective brands. These aggressive marketing strategies have led to various unethical practices which the corporates have hardly taken any steps to curb. Sometimes it becomes difficult to ascertain the actual quality of the organisation and the faculty. The widespread advertising also tends to confuse the common person.

INDIVIDUAL VS CORPORATES

Corporate and individual doctors have not always had a peaceful co-existence. Whenever a doctor has had outstanding success the corporate has tended to cut size the individual.

The corporates try to have a total control of the proceedings. The individual is guided totally by the corporate policy. However, the common patients on many occasions visit a corporate hospital to see an outstanding doctor who has delivered results over the years. The patients follow the leading doctors to wherever he or she may be attached.

The corporates and the doctors both have important roles in the health care industry. The existence should be peaceful to deliver the best results for the common patient.

THE COST FACTOR

The increasing cost of our corporate hospitals is a concern. It is difficult to give an accurate estimate in health care as the situation tends to change with time. However, one should either have a good insurance cover or good financial support before walking into any corporate hospital.

The common concept that the doctor is controlling the entire cost of therapy is incorrect. The patient must be clearly aware about his financial capability. A clear discussion with the corporate manager is absolutely essential.

THE CONTRIBUTION

Overall, corporate hospitals may have some ills but they have contributed to the health care of Bengal. The main contribution is in infrastructure. Many facilities which were not available are now easily accessible.

The huge infrastructure cost tends to be paid by the consumers. Since the cost of the health care industry is phenomenal, the overall treatment costs may be optimised.

Many complicated procedures which were not performed before in Calcutta are now being regularly done. This has saved many lives in the past two decades. Many a time corporates dream quantity but talk quality. Stress should be on better quality of service at reasonable cost.

Academics tend to take a back seat in corporates, thereby compromising quality which should not be the case. Meaningful association with government hospitals, especially in the academic sector, will give a boost to corporate hospitals. The need probably is large corporate hospitals at half the cost where the lower middle class can be accommodated.

Maintain the class compromise the shine.

The state government needs a regulatory body which needs to act without vindication. It is high time to deliver, not to press the panic button. It must be realised that the government sector caters to the majority of patients at a very low cost.

Corporates should realise their social responsibility and make bigger contributions to the health sector of Bengal, which they can if they visualise the larger scenario. Quantity is important but it is the quality which survives.

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What ails private health care in Calcutta? Tell tmetro@abpmail.com and we will get it answered