

**SPEECH OF SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE, FORMER
PRESIDENT OF INDIA ON THE OCCASION OF THE
INAUGURATION OF STATE-LEVEL CONFERENCE OF
IMA RAJASTHAN**

I am happy to be present amongst you on the occasion of the 29th Official Conference of Indian Medical Association, Rajasthan and the first Official Conference of All Rajasthan In-Service Doctors' Association (ARISDA).

2. At the outset, I would like to thank all the medical professionals present here today and through this medium, to all the medical professionals across the country for their service to mankind. Roman statesman Cicero had very rightly said and I quote, "***In nothing do men more nearly approach the gods than in giving health to men.***" (Unquote)

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen,

3. This conference could not have been at a more opportune time. In just two days, i.e., on **1st July** we celebrate **the National Doctor's Day** to honour the legendary physician and the second Chief Minister of West Bengal, Bharat Ratna, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy. I take opportunity to wish you all on the occasion of National Doctors Day.

4. Dr B.C. Roy firmly believed that *swaraj* for India would remain a dream unless the people were healthy and strong in mind and body. He made immense contributions in the field of medical education by establishing the Jadavpur T.B. Hospital, Chittaranjan Seva Sadan, R.G. Kar Medical College, Kamala Nehru Hospital, Victoria Institution, Chittaranjan Cancer Hospital and many more.

On December 15, 1956 in his Convocation Address at the University of Lucknow, Dr. Roy said, and I quote, ***“My young friends, you are soldiers in the battle of freedom-freedom from want, fear, ignorance, frustration and helplessness. By a dint of hard work for the country, rendered in a spirit of selfless service, may you march ahead with hope and courage...”***

(Unquote)

5. Today, I wish to say the same to you all. Your noble service to mankind through your profession, rendered in a spirit of healing and providing relief, gives you the courage to march ahead with your head held high. In light of recent events, the theme of this conference, I am informed is, **“Doctor Heal Thyself”**. It is indeed disheartening to see how our medical professionals are being treated by our own fellow citizens in the recent days when doctors on

duty were assaulted. I highly condemn this kind of violence. Moreover it is wrong to take the law in our own hands. There are proper structures and procedures in place to address grievances but no loss justifies violence. I wish to say that this kind of violent behavior is extremely disheartening and can demoralize the future doctors of our country.

What the people of this country need to understand is that this ongoing trend towards increasing violence towards doctors will only result in unintended consequences and may deter physicians from taking up complicated cases that have a higher chance of poor outcomes, out of fear of physical harm or threats.

6. Having said that, I would also like to point out that in a country like India, caregivers are revered almost as much

as divinity. Where people are slowed down by poverty and lack of accessibility to basic health care, Doctors are no less than Gods. It, therefore, becomes even more important for you to understand that your responsibility does not end with the discharge of your medical duties. It is not a stretch to then say that, the Doctors become responsible for the emotional well-being of his patients as well as the attendant whose last thread of hope is you. Like they say, ***presence of the doctor is the beginning of the cure.*** Along with being expert medical practitioners, you also have to be the bearer of all the news and you must find the time and the empathy to give the closure the families deserve.

You may have not asked for this or even considered this to be part of your job but that will not stop the patient or their family from seeking comfort directly from you.

Therefore, I implore you to be that sensitive and caring provider as it can make all the difference for someone trying to fathom loss.

7. As there are certain responsibilities of doctors and other healthcare workers, similarly, responsibilities also have to be borne by patients and their relatives, political parties, hospital authorities, the law and order machinery, media and government to see that health care improves by augmenting systems and man power rather than coercion of the health providers. Politicization of unrest in a sector as sensitive and over burdened as public health, to my mind will only prove detrimental for all stake holders. Hospitals should be places of compassion, caring and healing; not police zones with senseless violence and threat to lives of doctors themselves.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen

8. Good health, as an attribute of human well-being, precedes every other possession of mankind. Many years ago Lord Buddha observed and I quote, “***To keep the body in good health is a duty... otherwise we shall not be able to keep our mind strong and clear***” (Unquote).

A healthy population exhibits a greater disposition towards seeking education, acquiring knowledge and accessing employment opportunities. For a country like India, whose working population is one of the youngest in the world, attention to the health sector becomes urgent. Health is among the topmost priorities of the Government. Progress in this sector is key to India's future place of prominence in the world. Economic growth that does not go hand in hand with reduction in avoidable mortality and ill health is neither sustainable nor desirable.

9. In this regard, I am deeply concerned about the impoverishing impact of health and medical expenses on the vulnerable sections of our society. It is unacceptable that almost 80% of the expenditure on healthcare by our people is met by personal, out of pocket, payment. I am disheartened at the fact that crores of people of our country plunge into poverty each year due to expenses on medical treatment. Yet, we should remember that the health services for the poor cannot be poor health services. We need to craft a high quality national health system that is used by the poor and the rich alike.

10. Knowledge is the driver of today's world. While we stand today at the cusp of greatness in several fields on the global platform, our energy and innovation thrust in the field of medical sciences is yet to scale the heights. We need to find innovative solutions in health care,

discovering new cures, harnessing existing and emerging technologies for affordable healthcare, and exploring new paradigms for preventing disease and creating wellness. India should be a power house of biomedical research. We should develop world class centers of excellence focused not only on traditional specialties but also on cross-cutting themes such as infectious diseases, vaccine development and regenerative sciences. We have the ability to step forward and become leaders in the world of medicine. I am positive that the government will support you in this endeavour in every possible way but the doctors, students and researchers must show that they can push frontiers of biomedical research and innovation to the highest orbit.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen

11. Health is one of the fundamental pillars of human resource development in any society. It is indeed

necessary to put in more and more investment in the healthcare sector and incentivize it for the private sector. We need to be careful while doing this lest we privatize it while making it unaffordable. The share of India's GDP in health is just about 1.5%. I hope, in these coming years, healthcare is given the importance it deserves. Such dismal investment benefits neither the provider nor the recipient. Moreover, a lack of resources further limits the extent to which a healthcare service provider can help. A healthcare system resting on the essential trinity of availability, quality and affordability is a sine qua non of a developed country.

12. In India, extending the reach of our country's health coverage has been a long-drawn endeavour. Time has come for India to aim at attaining Universal Health Coverage. It is possible today to leverage reasonable

amount of resources to make bold and sustained investment in health. I am of the firm opinion that until public spending on health rises to 2.5% of the GDP, we will not be able to see the desired results. In our country, Public health system needs to be greatly expanded and strengthened. We need many more nurses, doctors, paramedics and health workers. We need to decentralize planning and implementation of healthcare to the district and sub-district levels. We need to take health services closer to the homes of the families-even a primary health centre is too far by today's standard and need.

We need out of the box managerial and administrative reforms in the health departments at the state and central level. We need public health professionals to spearhead public health programs. We need to develop effective models of healthcare for the ever-increasing urban

population. The foundation of India's national health system must be a strong, sensitive and efficient public health system.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

13. I would like to draw your attention towards the tragedy where about 200 children lost their innocent lives to a simple and fully treatable illness of acute encephalitis syndrome (AES) in Bihar. Such tragedy is simply unacceptable after more than 70 years of our independence. The fact that this happened largely due to malnutrition coupled with lack of basic health infrastructure puts a great question mark on our developmental journey. Lack of human resource is as responsible for inadequate health service as the lack of physical infrastructure especially in rural areas.

The density of doctors in India is only 0.6 per 1,000 and that of nurses and midwives 1.30 per 1000, representing collectively 1.9 health workers per 1,000 pointing clearly to the acute shortage of healthcare professionals. In addition, because of a skewed distribution of cadres of health workers, the vulnerable populations in rural, tribal and hilly areas continue to be under-served. We must, therefore, ensure a sizeable expansion in teaching institutions for doctors, nurses and paramedics. Positive traditional healthcare practices and local remedies need to be encouraged in this regard.

14. Towards the end I would just like to say that Medicine is a profession respected by all in society. Doctors are life givers who are given a place next to God. Voltaire had very correctly said, and I quote, ***“Those who are occupied in the restoration of health to others, by the joint exertion of skill and humanity, are above all the great of the earth. They even partake of divinity, since to preserve and renew is almost as noble as to create.”*** (Unquote) I am sure our medical fraternity will respect the good faith and trust that people have bestowed upon them. You all are empowered to contribute to the nation, to touch and transform the lives of millions. I hope that you will remain firm in your conviction to the higher objective of selfless service to society. I wish you all success in life and career.

Thank You