

Clip: 1 of 1

Bid to ensure free treatment for diseases not requiring hospitalisation

'Medicines make up an enormous share of total health care costs'

Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI: Private spending accounts for a whopping 72 per cent of the total health expenditure in India, 89.5 per cent of which is paid by patients and as a result of this with a single hospitalisation 32.5 million people fall below the poverty line, and more than 40 per cent of those hospitalised are forced to borrow money or sell their assets to pay for treatment. Over 23 per cent of the ill never seek treatment due to their inability to pay and as high as 70 per cent of out-of-pocket health expenditures are spent on medicines.

These were some of the points that were discussed in a meeting on 'Meeting Health Rights By Free Treatment to All Indians -- Requirements and Challenges' which was jointly organised by various

• 'Rs.6,000 crore is required to provide free treatment for all diseases'

• 'Health costs are the second largest cause of rural indebtedness in India'

NGOs including Jan Swasthya Abhiyan, Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability, Oxfam India, Centre for Legislative Research and Advocacy, Sama and Prayas at the Constitution Club on Tuesday. The objective of the consultation was to sensitise Members of Parliament and other important segments of policy planners about this very vital issue and evolve an economical and social model to ensure free treatment to all citizens of India.

The group indicated that Rs.6,000 crore is required to provide free treatment for all

diseases not requiring hospitalisation.

"Health costs are the second largest cause of rural indebtedness in India. When we look at the costs on health borne by people, it is found that medicines make up an enormous share of total health care costs. Unfortunately this is made worse by the fact that doctors frequently prescribe additional medicines that add no real therapeutic value to treatment of a disease," noted a release jointly issued by NGOs.

Dr. Narendra Gupta of a non-government organisa-

tion, Prayas, said: "If medicines are acquired at bulk prices, it should only require around Rs.6,000 crore to provide free treatment for all diseases not requiring hospitalisation. Not only will this allow universal access to medicines for Indian citizens, but it will place significantly less burden on the health care system, as medicine costs will be reduced to the bulk prices paid by the Government. On the other hand, if each patient continues to buy individually, the total cost for the same amount of medication would be Rs.25,000 crore."

According to the Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability, the combined expenditure of Centre and States on health as proportion of GDP, was around 1.02 per cent in 2008-09 and only around 1.06 per cent in 2009-10.