Doctor on wheels

Access to doctors is still a luxury in some parts of our country. The health care system, essentially a State subject flounders. Ill-equipped Primary Health Centres (PHCs) and paucity of doctors are the norm. People who could otherwise have prevented the onset of a disease or had an opportunity for timely cure, suffer as a result. So, what happens when like-minded educated citizens think differently? Wheels of change are set in motion.

The closest another programme of the same type comes is the running example of the Nargis Dutt Mobile Hospital that concentrates solely, on cancer. The new concept is the Mobile Hospital and Research Centre which is a 'first' of sorts for comprehensive care on wheels. The launch State is scenic Uttaranchal. The agents of change are the TIFAC (Technology Information, Forecasting and Assessment Council) and the Department of Health, Government of Uttaranchal. The implementing agency is the Birla Institute of Scientific Research (BISR), Bhimtal. Others who set the tide turning are doctors and educationists. C. S. Pant, President of the Indian Radiology Association, the chief architect of the project and Pushpesh Pant, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi who lends his expertise on the local knowledge of this hilly State, are both closely involved.

The mobile hospital is a Siemens India built, 24-feet chassis to service hilly terrain instead of the normal 30-feet chassis. The layout of the unit consists of diagnostic facilities such as ultrasound, X-ray, ECG, laboratory, ENT, gynaecological facilities, dark room, tentage, etc. The patient would be attended to on a height adjustable couch. The core group of travelling doctors and paramedical staff would provide curative health care in the form of prescriptions, dispensing medicines and referral. Eventually, interested local medical staff will be inducted to lend support. For blackouts and erratic power supply, provision has been made for an on-board 7.5 kVA generator. Wherever possible, the mobile unit would park near a PHC. During the day the unit would serve as a hospital; at night the TV/DVD system fitted with a big screen would increase awareness on health issues to local communities. This is in conjunction with a Science and Technology project 'Jankar-E-Dhar', to be taken up in Bagheswar district, Uttaranchal.

The mobile hospital is expected to touch Chamoli, Badrinath, Bhageswar, Almora, Pithoragarh, Champawat, Pauri and parts of Rudraprayag. An estimated 25 lakh inhabitants in these areas would benefit. The mobile unit will make about two visits per month to these areas. Presently, starting with just one mobile unit, the goal is to cover about 13 districts.

The total project cost for one mobile hospital for five years is Rs 271.91 lakhs, with fixed costs of Rs 69 lakhs being met by TIFAC. The operational costs for five years will be shared between TIFAC and the Government of Uttaranchal.

The project recently launched with the release of a cheque for Rs 35 lakhs from TIFAC to BISR, may serve as a model for many such mobile hospitals, servicing India.

Another spin-off from this mobile hospital project would be the development of a health profile of the families and communities covered, while maintaining their computerized medical records. Initially, connectivity would be through mobile phones followed by the prospect of connectivity through telemedicine.

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Fusion technology project to get more funds

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), New Delhi has approved a hike in the sanctioned cost of India's fusion technology project from Rs 166 to Rs 232.5 crore. The Institute of Plasma Research (IPR), Gandhinagar will get this money. IPR, an autonomous institution under the Department of Atomic Energy, has been serving as a nodal centre for the development of the national fusion energy programme.

The first phase of the project, focusing on thermonuclear fusion, is called the Steady State Superconducting Tokamak-1 (SST-1). This is a multi-objective time-bound project, aimed at providing accelerated development of the country's fusion technology capacity. The successful operation of SST-1 in the first few years of this century, will put India in the front league of fusion technology research.

P. M. Narayanan

NEWS UPDATE

Retraction of published claim for observation of superheavy element 118

A Research News entitled 'New elements discovered and the island of stability sighted' in *Current Science*, 1999, **77**, 328–330 had been based on a letter by V. Ninov *et al.* in *Phys. Rev. Letts.*, 1999, **83**, 1104.

Now, after a lapse of nearly three years, an Editorial Note in *Phys. Rev. Letts.*, 2002, **89**, 039901 (E), 15 July 2002, states that 'All but one of the authors of the original Letter have asked us to publish the following retraction' and proceeds to quote the retraction. The last line of the retraction states, 'We retract our published claim for the synthesis of element 118.'

K. R. Rao