

**Sunday, October 23, 2016**http://epaper.dawn.com/DetailNews.php?StoryText=23_10_2016_118_005**An interactive session on healthcare for the less-privileged was held at IoBM****‘Govt failed to utilise 69pc of health budget last year’**

KARACHI: Official seriousness in tackling health challenges could be gauged from the fact that the provincial government could only utilise 31 per cent of the total amount allocated for health in last year’s budget while the major chunk of the amount remained unutilised. In comparison, the Punjab government spent 80pc, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 85pc to 90pc while Balochistan 35pc of their health budgets.

This point was highlighted during an interactive session on healthcare for the less-privileged held at the Institute of Business Management (IoBM) on Saturday.

Experts representing various private and public-sector healthcare institutions, welfare trusts, blood banks and pharmaceutical companies shared anecdotes from their professional struggle with the audience and spoke about the need to provide sustained support to the needy especially in the health sector.

‘In a country where 50pc of the population live below the poverty line, getting treatment at a medical facility is considered a luxury,’ Prof Anwar Naqvi representing the Sindh Institute of Urology and Transplantation (SIUT) said, adding that the government spending on health and education was negligible.

Health, he said, was a human right and it was important that those who were blessed with opportunities and excelled in life contribute their bit towards the betterment of the downtrodden and raise their voice for their rights.

Tracing SIUT’s history, he recalled that it started its journey more than four decades ago from a urology ward at the Civil Hospital Karachi and gradually it turned into an autonomous institution now providing free of cost treatment in a technologically sound environment.

So far, he said, over 5,000 kidney transplants had been carried out in 31 years at the institution while more than 12 million patients had been treated. A number of allied facilities for advanced education and research had also been developed.

Concluding his speech, he motivated the audience, most of whom comprised students, to live a life in service of humanity. ‘No matter what you do, keep a small ocean of your thought for the poor,’ he said.

In his brief speech, Dr Suleman Otho representing the health department said that the problem wasn’t just small allocation for health but also government negligence in failing to utilise whatever was allocated.

Asad Gondal, a representative of a multinational consumer goods company which launched a project in a rural area of Pakistan, shared details of the endeavour aimed at creating awareness of health and hygiene and its impact in saving life.

‘In Pakistan, 53,000 children lost their life every year to diarrhoea, a disease which is completely preventable if public is educated on the hazards of living in unhygienic conditions,’ he said, adding that the project executed in a Sargodha village (Dhori) reduced open defecation by 35pc and increased the practice of treating water before consumption by 45pc.

Senior eye specialist Dr Sharif Hashmani briefed the audience about his hospital’s services and, at the same time, underlined the need for creating public awareness of eye diseases. For instance, retinopathy of prematurity (ROP), a potentially blinding eye disorder that primarily affects premature infants and the blindness caused by diabetes. There is little awareness about ROP even among the medical staff.

Second, there is a dire need to develop human resource. For example, there is a dearth of counsellors who interact with patients and talk to them in detail about their illnesses,’ he said, adding that specialists were few and often didn’t have time to explain the disease to every patient in a satisfying manner.

Replying to a question, Nisar Ahmed of the Alamgir Welfare Trust said his team started off by supplying leftover foods from marriage halls to slums and gradually it developed an institution now delivering various social services. ‘If there is will, there is a way, no matter how challenging the circumstances are,’ he remarked.

Raheel Akhtar of the Youth Parliament, Pervez Jamil of IoBM and Riffat Alvi of Rangoonwala Foundation also spoke.

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