

WHO cares about Indians' health spend

Says 70% Lose Entire Income On Treatment

Kounteya Sinha | TNN

New Delhi: The World Health Organization (WHO) is worried about Indians' high out-of-pocket (OOP) expenses to buy medicines.

WHO says, 3.2% Indians will fall below the poverty line because of high medical bills. About 70% of Indians spend their entire income on healthcare and purchasing drugs, WHO suggests.

Dr Kathleen A Holloway, regional adviser of WHO, said, "About 70% Indians are spending their out-of-pocket income

HEALTH COSTS WEALTH



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on medicines and healthcare services in comparison to 30%-40% in other Asian countries like Sri Lanka, and are still suffering from infected diseases due to lack of best quality drugs

and healthcare facilities."

She stressed the need for effective monitoring system in India, while expressing concern about the lack of Drugs and Therapeutics Committee

(DTC) and Pharmacy and Therapeutics Committee (PTC) in Indian hospitals. WHO has been urging for the setting of these panels for the past 10 years. "These committees can play an effective role to provide patients more efficient and rational use of medicines," Kathleen added.

The Planning Commission accepts that OOP to pay for healthcare costs is a growing problem in India. It says 39 million Indians are pushed to poverty because of ill health every year. Around 30% in rural India didn't go for any treatment for financial constraints in 2004. In urban areas, 20% of ailments were untreated for financial problems the same year, said a recent study in the Lancet.

About 47% and 31% of hospital admissions in rural and urban India, respectively, were

financed by loans and sale of assets. States have cut down on spending to purchase drugs, adding to *aam admi's* woes.

Maharashtra spent 5.2% of its health expenditure last year on purchasing drugs as against 11.3% a decade ago. Rajasthan, Haryana, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh too followed suit during the same period.

Or, consider the case of Kerala. Even though the state spent the highest in India on drug procurement last year — 12.5% on health expenditure — the figure is still far less than what it had in 2001 (17%). The Planning Commission's expert group on universal health coverage says low public spending on drugs and non-availability of free medicines in healthcare facilities are major factors discouraging people from accessing public sector health units.