


Health Minister launches new health facilities at Delhi hospitals

Union Health Minister Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya inaugurated several new health facilities in Delhi government hospitals on 8th January 2024, showcasing the government's commitment to improving healthcare infrastructure.

He emphasized the "wellness approach" as crucial, where preventative measures and integrative medicine play a key role in keeping ailments at bay. He praised the rapid advancements in the health sector under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, highlighting the goal of holistic healthcare with strong synergy between preventive measures and modern facilities. He commended the reach of healthcare services to remote areas and the government's efforts to ensure equality through initiatives like Ayushman Bharat.

Dr. Mandaviya highlighted the significant steps taken to boost health infrastructure, such as doubling the number of medical colleges in the past nine years and dramatically increasing MBBS, PG, and Nursing seats. He pointed out the unique four-tier healthcare system in India, from grassroots to tertiary care, with Ayushman Arogya Mandir centers bridging the gap between rural communities and specialized consultations. He further emphasized India's global contribution to healthcare, extending medical services beyond its borders and embracing the philosophy of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam," viewing the world as one family.



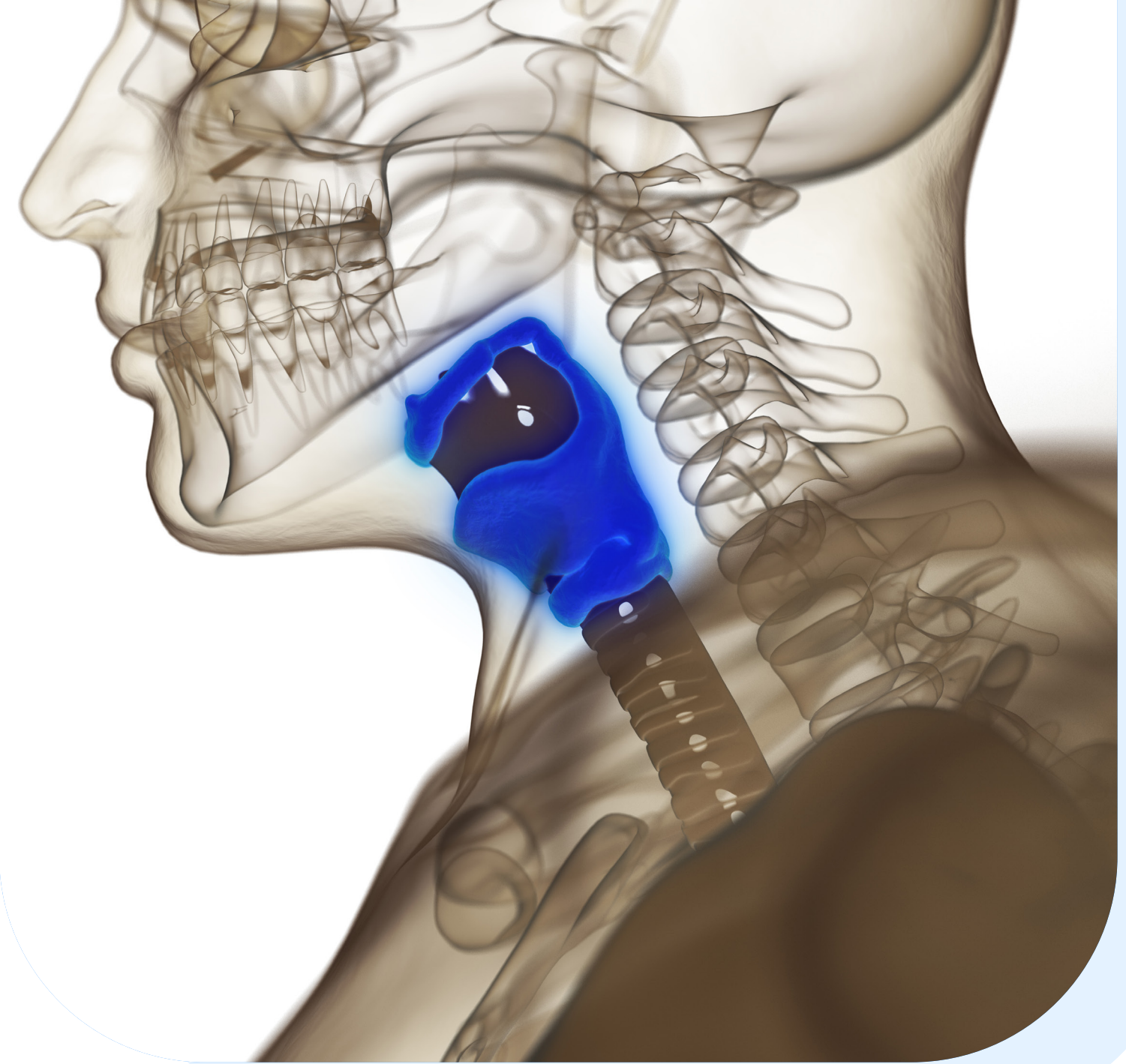


PM Modi: 30 new cancer hospitals in 9 Years, 10 more underway

In a recent initiative to combat cancer, India saw the inauguration of 30 new cancer hospitals over the past nine years, with an additional 10 under construction on 22nd January 2024. This expansion was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the foundation stone laying ceremony of a new cancer hospital in Gujarat. Recognizing the immense burden cancer places on individuals and families, Modi emphasized the government's commitment to making treatment accessible.

Early detection was highlighted as crucial, particularly in rural areas where diagnoses often come too late. To address this, Modi mentioned the establishment of over 1.5 lakh Ayushman Arogya Mandirs in villages, focusing on early detection of various serious illnesses, including cancer. He further noted the benefits these centers bring to women, specifically in identifying cervical and breast cancer early.

The Prime Minister also mentioned the opening of 10,000 Jan Aushadhi Kendras, providing medications at an 80% discount. These efforts demonstrate India's ongoing battle against cancer, aiming to improve accessibility and early detection, particularly in vulnerable communities. While India witnessed an estimated 8 lakh cancer deaths in 2022, highlighting the seriousness of the challenge, these initiatives represent a significant step towards improving cancer care and outcomes.



AIIMS and IIT-Delhi create affordable voice box for throat cancer patients

On January 21, 2024, AIIMS and IIT Delhi jointly unveiled an affordable prosthesis designed to restore the ability to speak for throat cancer patients who have lost their voice. Composed of silicon, the prosthesis is implanted during a tracheoesophageal puncture (TEP) procedure, creating a small opening between the trachea and esophagus. This innovative device allows air to flow from the lungs to the esophagus, causing vibrations at the top of the esophagus, resulting in a new tracheoesophageal voice.

The prosthesis is provided free of charge to AIIMS patients and may be accessible to others at a nominal cost. Learning to use the prosthesis is uncomplicated, and the replacement procedure, carried out in the outpatient department, is painless. TEP offers advantages over alternative alaryngeal speech methods, producing a more intelligible, fluent, and natural voice. Notably, annually, around four to five out of 25 larynx cancer patients, typically aged 50-60, face the risk of voice box removal.



Government urges doctors to specify indication in antimicrobial prescriptions

The Government took a significant step against antibiotic resistance (AMR) on 19th January 2024, by urging doctors to explicitly state the reason for prescribing antimicrobials, including antibiotics, antivirals, antifungals, and antiseptics. This directive, issued through letters to medical colleges, associations, and pharmacists, aims to curb the misuse and overuse of these crucial drugs.

Dr. Atul Goel, Director General of Health Services (DGHS), highlighted the growing concern of AMR, where microbes develop resistance to drugs designed to kill them, rendering infections difficult or impossible to treat. He emphasized the lack of new antibiotics in development, making responsible antibiotic use even more crucial. In 2019, AMR was linked to a staggering 1.27 million deaths globally, with 4.95 million deaths associated with drug-resistant infections.

The DGHS expressed serious concerns around the dire consequences of AMR, jeopardizing effective infection prevention and treatment, leading to prolonged illnesses and increased costs associated with potentially ineffective second-line drugs. By mandating doctors to state the reason for prescribing antimicrobials, the government aims to promote judicious use and hinder the spread of AMR, preserving the effectiveness of these life-saving drugs.

This initiative was met with support from medical professionals who highlighted the lack of new antibiotics in the pipeline, importance of responsible use and need for active participation from doctors, patients, and pharmacists in curbing this menace.



India invests Rs 5,000 crore in Pharma-MedTech innovation

In a major advancement for the pharma-medtech sector, the Indian government announced the “Promotion of Research and Innovation in Pharma-MedTech” (PRIP) initiative on 20th January 2024. This long-term scheme, allocated Rs 5,000 crore, aims to strengthen pharmaceutical infrastructure and boost research across six key areas: new drugs, complex generics, medical devices, stem cell therapy, orphan drugs, and anti-microbial resistance.

PRIP has two main components. The first, with Rs 700 crore dedicated, establishes seven Centres of Excellence at National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPER) institutes. The second component provides Rs 4,250 crore in financial assistance to companies collaborating with government institutes or conducting in-house R&D in these priority areas.

This initiative reflects the government’s commitment to foster a robust research and innovation ecosystem in the pharma-medtech sector. By encouraging industry-government collaboration and focusing on transformative areas, PRIP is expected to drive innovation, address critical healthcare challenges, and propel India’s position in global pharmaceutical advancements. With a clear vision for the future, PRIP is poised to significantly shape the future of the Indian pharma-medtech sector.



Apollo study sets new prostate cancer screening standards for Indian men

On 12th January 2024, in a breakthrough study published in the Indian Journal of Urology, Apollo Hospitals revealed new, India-specific prostate-specific antigen (PSA) reference values for men. This landmark study, involving nearly 100,000 healthy men, challenged the decades-old, US-based PSA standards adopted in India. Led by Dr. N Ragavan and Dr. Sanjai Addla, the study found significant differences in PSA levels among Indian men compared to Western populations. Key findings include age-specific PSA standards, a progressive increase in levels with age, and values enabling earlier detection in younger men. The study addressed the previously limited data on age-specific PSA levels in India and identified significant differences compared to Caucasian men. Dr. Addla sees this as an opportunity to redefine PSA reference ranges for Indian men, leading to more precise clinical decisions and ultimately, a more effective fight against prostate cancer. The study findings mark a significant shift in prostate cancer care for Indian men, paving the way for earlier detection and better clinical outcomes.

Apollo Joint Managing Director, Dr. Sangita Reddy, hailed the study as a transformative moment in prostate cancer care in India, aligning with their mission to conquer cancer. She emphasized the study's potential to facilitate earlier detection in younger men and reduce unnecessary investigations in older individuals. Dr. Sanjai Addla, the study's lead investigator, highlighted the crucial role of the extensive data collected (1 lakh healthy men) in bridging the gap in understanding PSA levels in Indian men. He believes, will enhance the accuracy of PSA testing and improve its efficacy as a diagnostic marker.

Vibrant Gujarat Summit focuses on holistic healthcare

The 10th edition of the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit concluded on January 12 with Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) for 41,299 projects, with potential investment proposals worth ₹26.33 lakh crore, being signed during the mega event. The biennial summit attracted huge investments in sectors such as green hydrogen, renewable power, e-mobility, semiconductors, financial services and fintech.

Inaugurated by Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, the Summit theme was “Holistic Healthcare: Good Health and Wellbeing for All,” reflecting Gujarat’s commitment to a comprehensive approach covering wellness, prevention, and alleviating healthcare system strain. The event spotlighted pharmaceuticals, medical devices, technology-driven healthcare, and holistic practices.

On the concluding day, Gujarat-based Torrent Group announced investments of ₹47,350 crore in various projects, including around 4500 MW renewable energy projects, development of a solar park in North Gujarat, ramping up power distribution network in Gujarat and setting up hydrogen manufacturing facilities in the State. Chief Minister Patel credited the summit’s success to Prime Minister Modi’s long-term vision on healthcare and industrial progress.



Google's new AI Chatbot has potential to diagnose like doctors

On 17th January 2024, Google developed a sophisticated conversational AI called AMIE, capable of holding diagnostic dialogues with patients and achieving accuracy on par with human doctors. This research project, detailed in a blog post and paper, represents a significant step towards conversational diagnostic AI in healthcare.

AMIE stands for Articulate Medical Intelligence Explorer, and leverages Google's vast language model technology. Trained in real-world medical data and simulated conversations, it can handle consultations across various diseases and specialties. To gauge its performance, Google pitted AMIE against 20 primary care physicians in simulated consultations involving trained actors. Both were evaluated by specialist physicians and patient actors on various criteria, including diagnostic accuracy, communication skills, and empathy.

The results were impressive. AMIE matched or even surpassed the physicians in most aspects, exhibiting superior diagnostic accuracy and communication skills for both specialists and patients. While acknowledging limitations such as the reliance on text-chat consultations, the researchers see this as a major milestone in creating AI for conversational diagnostics. Further research is necessary before AMIE can be implemented in real-world settings, but this success marks a promising future for AI-powered healthcare, potentially increasing access, quality, and consistency of care.



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