

Eliminating Discrimination in the Health Sector to Attain Universal Health Coverage

Dear Editor,

On the global front, it is extremely sad that discrimination in the health sector has prevailed for years together and it manifests in a wide range of ways.^[1,2] Such incidents of discrimination violate the basic human rights and affect both health workers and the beneficiaries.^[1,2] More often than not, the origin for such discrimination occurs because of the parameters such as ethnicity, gender, migration status, and prevailing prejudices and practices.^[1] Even though the world leaders are striving hard for the attainment of universal health coverage under the proposed sustainable development goals, the act of discrimination works exactly in the opposite direction.^[3]

Further, it negates the investments made in the health systems, discourages people from availing healthcare, interferes with the unity of the people and the process of empowerment, and raises serious questions about the dignity of the people.^[2,3] In addition, it also alters the social health determinants, as many people only interact with the health system as a part of their connection with the government, and any bad experience on this front, discourages them to take any part in the societal responsibilities.^[1-3] It is vital to realize that the acts of discrimination does not occur without any reason, but is usually derived from gender inequality and poor working conditions and minimal benefits to the health workers.^[1,3] In fact, female health professionals have to deal with the issue of violence, less and irregular salary, and limited involvement in the decision-making process.^[2,4]

It is vital to understand that if we succeed in addressing discrimination, it will aid extensively in the accomplishment of various other sustainable development goals.^[1] At the same time, it is essential to realize that the solutions for discrimination often lie beyond the health sector, and thus there is a great need to actively involve the concerned sector, including communities to eventually reach a permanent and a sustainable solution.^[2-4] Thus, the need of the hour is to involve all the stakeholders and mount a multi-sectoral response, so that discrimination comes to an end.^[3] At the same time, there is an immense need to implement legal measures to discourage the practice of discrimination and respect autonomy in decision-making pertaining to health care.^[1] It has to be supported by creating

strong evidence and aid it simultaneously with legal the provisions to ensure accountability for discrimination in health settings.^[1,3]

In addition, the health workers should be sensitized about their rights and how to approach if they are exposed to discrimination during their career.^[1] For the benefit of the general population, patient charters should be displayed in each of the healthcare facilities, and they should be made aware of their human rights.^[2] Acknowledging the significance of the problem and the need for a comprehensive and united response, some of the nations have joined their hands and launched a network to facilitate quality, equity and dignity in healthcare, especially for vulnerable sections of people.^[2-4]

To conclude, the issue of discrimination in healthcare settings is a major global public health concern, and it is high time that the issue is addressed on an emergency note if the global leaders want to achieve universal health coverage.

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