

Jan Swasthya Abhiyan Rajasthan Calls for Revamping Schemes of Free Medicines and Diagnostics and Increasing Public Spending on Health Care

Jan Swasthya Abhiyan Rajasthan held a public dialogue “Jan Swasthya Adhikar Manch” here at Shaheed Smarak Jaipur to draw government’s attention towards the depleting state of public health care services in the state. The Abhiyan argued that the state’s spending on health care which is even lesser than 2% of the state GDP was grossly inadequate to provide quality health care services to its population of 7 crores and that the out of pocket expenditure on health care has been on a rise as a result. The Abhiyan also criticized the increasing dependence of the state on private health care providers for health care delivery which is not only leading to diversion of huge public funds into private hands but is also resulting in severe cases of exploitation and abuse of patients by the private health care providers. About 45 cases related to violation of health rights and patient’s rights were presented during the one day event and more than 300 people from across the state came together to voice for their health rights.

During the dialogue, instances of individuals having suffered serious denial of right to healthcare from public health facilities, private hospitals, or in context of Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) healthcare arrangements were presented. Several women reported cases of sterilization failure and denial to compensation. It must be noted here that Rajasthan records highest rate of sterilization failures in the country. This in itself raises a huge question on the quality of reproductive health services being delivered in the state. There were cases of maternal and child deaths which highlighted various dimensions of negligence and insensitivity on the part of the health care providers.

Several reported how the schemes related to free medicines and free diagnostics were failing their mandates with facilities often running out of essential medicines and free diagnostic services becoming less readily available. Cases wherein people had to go through tremendous hardships in seeking benefits of Bhamashah Swasthya Bima Yojana (BSBY) due to complicated eligibility criteria and how they were misled by private health facilities to squeeze out more money out of their pockets were also presented. The dialogue also highlighted several cases depicting how lack of infrastructure and human resources at public health facilities has been forcing people to seek care from private hospitals spending huge amounts out of their own pockets. People also presented cases wherein health facilities being run under PPP mode have generated major dissatisfaction among community members due to extremely poor quality of services being delivered and they went on to demand that the health facility be taken back by the government under its full control.

All the testimonies were heard by a panel of eminent health and human rights experts including Dr. Mira Shiva (Public Health Expert), Dr. Narendra Gupta (Public Health Expert), Dr. Laad Kumari Jain (Ex. Chairperson Rajasthan Women’s Commission), Dr. Meeta Singh (Public Health Expert), Sh. Sawai Singh (Chairperson, Samagra Seva Sangh). The panel put forward recommendations on individual cases so presented and also on policy and systemic issues to ensure that similar cases of violation or denial of health rights could be eliminated in the future.

The set of recommendations would soon be submitted to the government by JSA demanding immediate action on them.

JSA has raised the following demands in the light of various cases of denial and violation of health rights presented during the dialogue :

- Increase public spending on health care to at least 4% of the state GDP in the next budget.
- Upgrade infrastructure and availability of human resources at public health facilities
- Take immediate action to restore and expand free medicines and free diagnostic schemes. Pump them with more funds for better implementation.
- Stop privatising public health facilities in the name of PPP.
- Stop diverting tax payer's money to serve the interests of corporate and private health care agencies through various PPP interventions. Rather invest that money to strengthen public health facilities.
- Revamp preventive and primary health care services so that people have easy access to health care services and the secondary and tertiary health care facilities are not overburdened.
- Ensure that eligibility criteria for seeking benefits of BSBY are relaxed and empanelled private hospitals are strictly checked and monitored.
- Implement Clinical Establishments Act and ensure effective regulation on private health care providers.
- Establish a state level institution for quality assurance of health services as per the Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS).