

INDIA IS AT A PIVOTAL MOMENT IN ITS HEALTH-CARE JOURNEY

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'While India is already one of the leading destinations for patients seeking care abroad, there is adequate headroom for growth' | Photo Credit: Getty Images

In the last few years, India has steadily become a strong voice for various critical issues. Whether it is climate change, electrification, new age manufacturing or the space race, India is at the forefront and even leading the change. This has never been more apparent recently when India became the first country to successfully land a mission near the south pole of the moon and concluded a very successful G-20 presidency, fostering global alignment on a range of key issues.

It is heartening to witness a new India emerging — an India that is ambitious; an India that believes in its destiny to be the global leader; an India that is guided by the heritage of an ancient civilisation but fuelled by the energy, passion and ambition of its youth.

However, this is also the same India that is now the world's diabetes capital; also, millions have hypertension, and its youth are succumbing to heart attacks, cancer, respiratory issues, depression and more.

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If left unchecked, India's non-communicable diseases (NCD) burden will be nearly \$4 trillion by 2030. This is one of the biggest roadblocks to India's development and will create an 'age tax' on India's demographic dividend. We must act together, and with urgency to prevent this or else India's decade could turn into a generation of lost opportunity.

I urge the health-care industry to join hands and protect India from this menace by increasing awareness, advocating better lifestyle choices and enabling comprehensive health checks that include proper scans instead of having just blood tests that are simply inadequate to test for many early signs of diseases.

The country has come a long way from 1983 when we started Apollo, and has made tremendous progress on key health metrics. Infant mortality has improved by four times, maternal mortality has improved by seven times and the average life expectancy of an Indian is up nearly 30% from 55 years to over 70 now.

In fact, today, India has world-class health-care infrastructure along with incredible clinical talent that delivers the best in class clinical outcomes at incredible scale and at a fraction of the global price. India's expertise in highly specialised areas such as organ transplants, cardiology, oncology and more has made the country a fast-growing destination for medical value travel (MVT), not just for the price but also for the speed of access and the sheer quality of care.

India has emerged as a global MVT hub, particularly in the fields of oncology, orthopaedics, and robotic surgery. A significant milestone in this journey is the introduction of proton beam therapy technology, making India a regional leader in cancer treatment. Patients from across the globe are drawn to India for its world-class medical expertise, state-of-the-art infrastructure, and cost-effective care.

Orthopaedic procedures, including joint replacements and spinal surgeries, are conducted by highly skilled surgeons using minimally invasive techniques. This attracts patients seeking top-notch orthopaedic care at competitive prices.

Robotic surgery has also gained popularity, with India's hospitals adopting robotic-assisted techniques for precision and faster recovery. The country's expertise in this area draws international patients seeking minimally invasive, high-precision surgical interventions.

MVT is gaining strategic importance given its ability to create employment as well as earn foreign exchange. While India is already one of the leading destinations for patients seeking care abroad, there is adequate headroom for growth.

Moreover, fostering collaboration between the public and private sectors is crucial for realising this vision. Public-private partnerships can help create a conducive environment for MVT by jointly investing in infrastructure, promoting medical tourism, and setting up international health-care accreditation bodies.

'India's expertise in highly specialised areas has made the country a fast-growing destination for medical value travel' | Photo Credit: Getty Images

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming health care worldwide, and India has the potential to be at the forefront of this revolution. The country possesses a vast pool of talented data scientists, engineers, and health-care professionals who can drive innovation in AI-driven health-care solutions.

One of the key areas where AI can make a significant impact is in diagnostics. AI-powered tools can enhance the accuracy and efficiency of medical diagnoses, leading to faster treatment decisions and better patient outcomes. Additionally, AI can help predict disease outbreaks, analyse health-care data, and optimise treatment plans, expediting health-care procedures, and revolutionising drug discovery ultimately making health care more personalised and effective.

India has already made strides in AI applications for health care, but it must continue to invest in research and development, foster collaborations between academia and industry, and create an ecosystem that encourages innovation. Doing so can position India as a global leader in AI-driven health-care solutions, exporting its expertise to benefit health-care systems worldwide. AI expenditure in India is expected to reach \$11.78 billion by 2025. It is expected to add \$1 trillion to India's economy by 2035.

India stands at a pivotal moment in its health-care journey. By reimagining its health-care model, the country can position itself as the global destination for medical value travel, a powerhouse in AI-driven health-care solutions, and a leader in combating NCDs. To achieve this vision, India

must prioritise community health, foster public-private partnerships, and invest in innovation and research. With concerted efforts and a commitment to excellence, a healthier and more prosperous India can be built for generations to come.

Dr. Prathap C. Reddy is Founder and Chairman, Apollo

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