

Is there a crisis in health care in India?

Some Critical Reflections

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We often come across statements regarding a crisis in health and medicine. Is there a crisis in our health services? There may be a number of crises which plague the health services across the world and it appears that there is an effort to homogenize these crises without considering the contextual specificities. There are also ideological differences in the way in which this crisis is posed in the literature. The crisis cuts across chronology and is multi-level which is more often constructed on the basis of elite perceptions and professional positions. As Navarro put it way back in 1986, the crisis had been telescoped on the institutions of medicine and their practices. The 'gaze' never extended to the larger social structures and other sectors which engender health or which produces ill-health.

In international public health, the usual depiction of crisis is in terms of higher cost-lesser care – one of the perennial issues which emerge during elections in many developed countries, the questions of affordability which led to the emergence of managed care in the US, issues regarding chronic care and inability of the health services to handle such issues in countries such as Germany etc. Much of the writings on crisis in health care came out during the seventies when the US health care was in shambles. This was the result of “public consternation over the crisis in medical care stimulated by rapidly rising prices and growing dissatisfaction about the availability of services”. The recent depiction of crisis in health care is related to the shortage of human resources due to international migration which is considered to be affecting the delivery of health services in the developing countries. **This paper, based on existing literature and data sets is an attempt to critically reflect on the recent depiction of crises in the health service system given the increasing epidemic outbreaks and emerging diseases in several parts of the country.**

With respect to developing countries including India, the salient crisis at various points of time is the non-accessibility and non-availability of health care to large sections of the people despite the fact that the poor overwhelmingly prefer the government health care services.

The paper concludes that human resource issue especially at the lower levels is an important component which needs attention. However, more often it is forgotten that the health services is essentially a system consisting of people delivering services and instead it is considered as a techno-enterprise handling diseases using technology. In societies where crisis has been discussed in the light of major outbreaks of diseases recently such as in Kerala, the present conception of crises has led to an institutional atrophy as well as a dominantly technicalization of its services.