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### Union Budget 2017 & Healthcare Industry

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Union budget 2017 gave some positive hopes to the masses but at the same time some decisions also disappointed the people. Undoubtedly the budget was proved as a boon for agriculture industry, our Indian Farmers and MSMEs. Apart from agriculture industry, there was quite little to offer for healthcare sector in this union budget. But still, the healthcare industry managed to get few good measures like 20% increase in allocation for the National Health Mission, New rules regarding medical devices and generic medicines to reduce their cost, action plans to eliminate certain diseases and reduce mortality rates, transformation of 1.5lac health sub centers into health wellness centres, Structural transformation of regulatory framework for medical education in India, measures to improve the availability of specialist doctors through increase in 5000 post graduate seats and setting up of AIIMS in Jharkhand and Gujarat.

According to **Mr. Naveen Sharma, Head Business Development, PSRI Hospital**, "I am quite glad after seeing the union budget for the healthcare sector as government has planned a lot which can give benefit the masses directly such as creating new AIIMS in two big and well populated states of India i.e. Jharkhand and Gujarat. Also the burden of disease like tuberculosis affects our nation very badly, and it was very much required to target this deadly disease and eliminate it soon and our government took this initiative, so this is another reason for my happiness with this budget. Not only this, but the budget will also sort one major issue in healthcare industry i.e. shortage of doctors by increasing 5,000 post graduate medical seats per annum".



Some experts are glad with this budget whereas some have few disappointments like prohibition on exchange of 3 lacs in cash. Undoubtedly this decision to curb black money was praiseworthy but at the same time this decision doesn't allow the patients from rural areas to get their expensive treatments with cash. Hospitals feel that the majority of rural population is not friendly with the plastic money and other digital payment options. So how will they pay for their treatment?

According to **Dr. Anand Bansal, Medical Director at Sri Balaji Action Medical Institute**, "In this union budget, the initiative by the government for AIIMS in Jharkhand and Gujarat is such a great step for the industry and masses, as apart from treatment it will help in boosting the employment opportunities as well. Another big announcement by Government to increase 5000 post graduate medical seats per annum which is quite appreciable and will surely be fulfilling the shortage of doctors. Also we hope that the plan for eliminating leprosy and tuberculosis by 2025 will be executed and implemented at earliest to get rid of these problems. The only area where I am feeling bit disappointed with this union budget is prohibition on exchange of 3 lacs in cash. I feel hospitals should be exempted from this as most of the patients from Tier 2 or Tier 3 cities will not be able to use plastic money and bring cash for their treatment".

This budget also took some encouraging step for women welfare by allocating Rs. 500 crore for Mahila Shakti Kendras which will surely support the services for empowering rural women with opportunities for their skill development, employment, digital literacy, health and nutrition. It actually gives confidence and motivation to women to stand on their own. Another major announcement is Aadhaar-based smartcards which enables the senior citizens to store and monitor their health conditions digitally. So from now on their Aadhar will be the bank of their medical records and history. Also the step for financial assistance to pregnant women of Rs. 6,000 each is quite appreciable. But the best part is that the amount will be transferred directly to the bank accounts of pregnant women not via any mediator.

According to **Mr. Baldev Raj, Healthcare Consultant**, "The Allocation of Rs 500 crore for Mahila Shakti Kendras is a positive step taken by the Govt. which will help in strengthening the female population of India. As the female workforce in India is comparatively less, such schemes will help to generate employment opportunities in various sectors. The initiative giving financial assistance to pregnant women of Rs 6000 each is another notable step by the Government. However the assistance should not be limited only to Rs 6000 but also the women should be given employment opportunities to support their new born and the economy. The initiative taken by the Govt. for its senior citizens by introducing the Aadhar based health cards which will help to look after their health and well being and also in achieving affordable healthcare. I also appreciate the commendable step of raising the budget for Women and child welfare from Rs 1.56 lakh or to Rs 1.84 lakh or as it will help in promoting women entrepreneurs. Many job opportunities will be created by this step and will surely help in empowering the women of our country."

Another benchmark in this budget is the introduction of 'Digi Gaon' initiative from which Primary care can be received by the people in rural areas through Tele Medicine Centers. Also, the move of making 133 kms of roads per day will help in better connectivity of the rural areas which will help in the better availability of secondary and tertiary treatment.

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