

Editorial

Tertiary Care Centers: Are They Justified In Pakistan

The whole world is looking very closely at the expense side of all human service industries including the vital and potentially life saving medical services. Why then is it that despite such pressures, the cost of medical treatment is rising around the world? How then are the industrialized countries justifying spending such vast sums on advanced medical technology needed to save far fewer lives compared to the much cheaper preventive medicine and community health measures? The very simple answer is that those countries have nearly but solved their public health problems and epidemics of diarrhoea, malaria, typhoid and the like. They have ensured potable water and sewage disposal and have elaborate programmes and general awareness about healthy environment and its protection. Therefore, they can now justifiably turn their attention and spend their billions on sophisticated technology to save the few with less common diseases.

Where does the Third World stand where people still die of simple preventable epidemics and unclean water-borne epidemics and diseases transmitted due to lack of hygiene? Are we to wait for all the population to obtain their water supply and sewage disposal and clean clothes before we open hospitals and centers for sophisticated medical care? Should we let one patient with a myocardial infarction die so that ten children with diarrhoea may live? What are poor people like us to do?

One thing is very clear. The public sector must have its priorities dictated by welfare of the largest numbers. In the Government's policy the diarrhoea must take precedence over the infarction. However, depending on the magnitude of the problem, the Government must support different areas of curative medicine and sophisticated technologies to a varying degree. If justice is to be done in a system such as ours, the individual shall have to bear an increasing burden for increasingly sophisticated medical care. The Government must assure preventive and community healthy measures and the private sector will have to bear a greater burden for individual diseases. Finally, one may ask if it is justice to give the poor man clean drinking water and sewage disposal and vaccinations and then pat him on the back and bid him goodbye while the rich buy the most advanced care in the same city? Or, is it justice to let a few elite travel abroad for treatment on Government funds, to have a few show-piece curative centers for those who can't be sent abroad and let the preventable epidemics take their toll?

Editor.