New ministers for health in India

Mr Jagat Prakash Nadda took over as the Union Minister for Health in the Government of India on 10 November 2014. He succeeded Dr Harsh Vardhan, who has been made Union Minister of Science and Technology and Earth Sciences. Dr Vardhan had served as minister since May 2014. Dr Vardhan has been known for his strong anti-tobacco stance.

The 55-year-old Mr Nadda, who is also the national general secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Party, has earlier been Health Minister of Himachal Pradesh, the state that he represents in the Rajya Sabha. In addition to this change, Mr Shripad Yesso Naik has been made Minister of State for AYUSH and health and welfare.

SANJAY A. PAI, Bengaluru, Karnataka

Increase in number of medical colleges, undergraduate seats and postgraduate seats in medicine in India

There has been an increase in the number of medical colleges and consequently of undergraduate and postgraduate seats in India. While there were 387 medical colleges in India in 2013–14, the number has risen to 404 in 2014–15. The states with the maximum number of colleges are Karnataka (47), Andhra Pradesh (46), and Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra (45 each). The corresponding number of undergraduate and postgraduate seats in these states are 6905/3548; 6900/2875; 5915/2552 and 6195/3218, respectively. Tamil Nadu has had a decline in the number of undergraduate seats compared to the previous year.

There are a total of 54 352 undergraduate and 25 416 postgraduate seats annually now.

SANJAY A. PAI, Bengaluru, Karnataka

Improvement in mortality indices in India, though National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) goal yet not achieved

There has been a steady decline in the infant mortality rate (IMR), maternal mortality ratio (MMR) and total fertility rate (TFR) after the launch of the NRHM though the goals that were set for 2012 have not yet been achieved. This was stated by the Health Minister of India, Shri J.P. Nadda in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha. He also stated that the achievements on many key indicators had not been as per the goals mainly on account of inadequate funding and governance challenges in certain states. Instances of misuse of NRHM funds such as misappropriation, diversion of funds from one pool to another without authorization, infructuous purchases, etc. have been pointed out through audit and remedial actions are sought.

The percentage annual compound rate of decline in TFR has risen from 1.8% in 1990–2005 to 2.7% during 2005–12. The percentage annual compound rate of decline in IMR rose from 2.1% observed during 1990–2005 to 4.5% during 2005–13. The percentage annual compound rate of decline in MMR has increased from 5.1% during 1990–2005 to 5.8% during 2005–11.

Professor K. Srinath Reddy awarded honorary Doctor of Science (Medicine) degree by the University of London

Dr K. Srinath Reddy, President of the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), which he has headed since its inception in 2006, was conferred the title of Doctor of Science (Medicine) honoris causa by the University of London on 26 November 2014. The ceremony, which was conducted at the Buckingham Palace, saw Dr Reddy being felicitated by HRH Princess Anne, of Britain, Chancellor of the University of London. The award is in recognition of Dr Reddy’s contributions to cardiology and the public health sector.
Dr Reddy is currently President of the World Heart Federation (2013–15) and is the first Indian to hold this position. He has been the Head of the Department of Cardiology at the prestigious All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi as well as President of the National Board of Examinations (2009–14). Readers of this Journal will also be aware that he was editor of the NMJI from 1997 to 2005. In addition, he chaired the High Level Expert Group on Universal Health Coverage, which was instituted by the Planning Commission of India during the planning stage of India’s 12th Five-Year Plan. He is also the first Bernard Lown Visiting Professor of Cardiovascular Health at the Harvard School of Public Health. Dr Reddy was awarded the Padma Bhushan by the President of India in 2005 and was involved in the formulation of WHO’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

With Dr Reddy at its helm, PHFI has set up five Indian Institutes of Public Health in various parts of the country and is involved in public education and research programmes directed towards creation of affordable technologies to strengthen primary health services. Dr Reddy has published research papers and best practice guidelines related to trends in heart diseases in various international journals. He has promoted work- and school-based programmes for prevention of heart disease and diabetes through a voluntary organization (HRIDAY-SHAN).

Dr Reddy, who has been a member of several global committees of the WHO, World Bank and World Economic Forum among others, told this correspondent: ‘This is an honour that highlights the growing importance of global health in an increasingly inter-connected and inter-dependent world. International academic partnerships are now even more pivotal for raising the profile and performance of global health research. I merely happen to represent India’s public health and medical communities which have a major leadership role to play in shaping global health in this century. While I am happy to receive recognition of my personal contributions in several areas of health research and policy, the award really reflects the importance of the collective contribution that Indian health professionals are making to advance global health to higher levels of effectiveness and equity.’

MAHARRA HUSSAIN, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

The National Medical Journal of India is looking for correspondents for the ‘News from here and there’ section. We are particularly interested in getting newswriters from the north and northeast regions of India as well as from other countries. By news, we refer to anything that might have happened in your region which will impact on the practice of medicine or will be of interest to physicians in India. The emphasis of the news items in this column, which are usually from 200 to 450 words, is on factual reporting. Comments and personal opinions should be kept to a minimum if at all. Interested correspondents should contact SANJAY A. PAI at sanjayapai@gmail.com or nmji@nmji.in