Primary Healthcare Clinics in India- An Overview of the Exisitng Problems and Potential Solutions

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Introduction:

Primary clinics is an essential approach to healthcare and well bring centered on the needs and preferences of individuals, families and communities. Primary healthcare clinics are the first point of contact between the patient community and the doctors, focusing on accessibility, affordability and awareness to every individual of the community.

The World Health Organization (WHO) elaborates Primary healthcare into three major categories:

1. Empowering healthcare among communities.

2. Improving accessibility of care through multi- sectoral policy and action.

3. Promoting essential public health needs.

The Challenge – So, where are the gaps?

The challenge lies in providing reliable hospitalization to the underserved community of urban and rural areas. End-to-end healthcare service that offer sustainable healthcare through community involvement, technology enablement, and better physical and financial connectivity, can play a pivotal role in bridging the gaps in Indian healthcare. These gaps are highlighted in terms of expectation and what start-ups can think about.

Inequitable distribution of Healthcare:

About 70% of India's population live in rural areas making it harder for these people to access care compared to those who live in urban areas. Lack of infrastructure, inpatient and outpatient facilities limits the access of Healthcare to rural population.

Shortage of Physicians:

Shortage of trained physicians and nurses nationwide at a ratio of 1:1456 and 2:1000 respectively. -This shortfall can impact the patient community through delayed healthcare services and can further restrict the consultations due to overcrowding.

Lack of utilization of appropriate technologies:

Medical technology should be provided in such a way that is accessible, affordable, and feasible to the community. Less usage of point of care medical devices is the potential drawback owing to the large patient population.

Deficiency of multi- sectoral approach:

Healthcare services cannot be improved within just a formal health sector, other sectors are equally important in promoting the health and self- reliance of patient community. - Multi-sectoral approach can provide instant access concerning the prevailing health issues in a more efficient way.

Expensive Hospitalization:

High out-of-pocket expenditure in the healthcare system make hospitalization and consultations difficult for the ordinary people. Due to low total healthcare expenditures (4 % of GDP per year) by the Government and lack of health insurance awareness among the Indian people.

Potential gaps due to the unorganized system:

• Patient community- How to choose a doctor for my treatment? Does the clinic have adequate infrastructure?

• Improper scheduling of appointments leading to overcrowding and long waiting hours of the patients. • Quality of healthcare service provided for relevant money paid by the patients.

• No information regarding the patient health history for providing better treatment.

• Need for patients to carry diagnostic reports and prescriptions each time they visit the doctor.

• Lack of aftercare by the clinics- patient follow up for effective healthcare experience

Materials and Methods:

The Key- Essentials in bridging the gap:

1. ENHANCED INFRASTRUCTURE FACILITIES: - To make healthcare inclusive and cost-effective in urban areas, several health services can be rendered at existing primary care clinics by adopting digital technologies and point of care devices. This can impact the patient community by eliminating long-waiting hours thus providing instant access to healthcare thereby promoting effective communication network. In rural areas, this gap can be bridged through health spots thus providing affordable quality

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healthcare accessible to the community. Further, these primary clinics and health spots offer an integrated solution through regular monitoring and diagnostics of the prevailing healthcare problems.
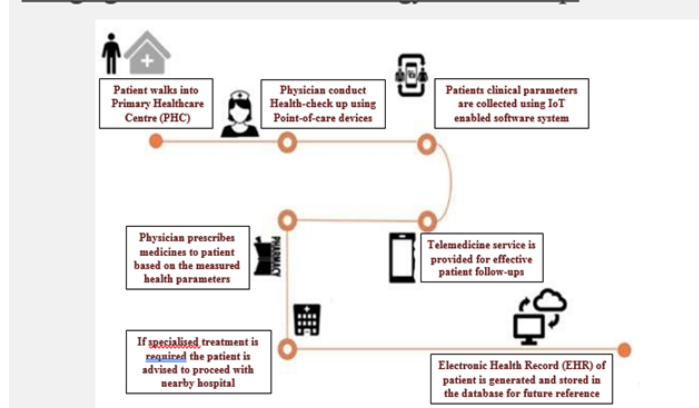
2. APPROPRIATE UTILIZATION OF TECHNOLOGIES: This gap can be bridged by technology enablement of healthcare delivery. Effective implementation of Information Technology (IT platform) can play a pivotal role in making healthcare accessible across India. There is a great opportunity to build primary healthcare clinics at a low cost footprint in both urban and rural areas by making use of telemedicine technology and point of care medical devices (a portable kit, containing IoT based medical devices like pulse oximeter, portable haemoglobin and glucose monitor, portable ECG device etc) thereby providing basic diagnostic services instantly to the patient community. Primary health clinics accompanied by Electronic Health Records (EHR-An electronic version of complete patient history maintained by the doctor over time) can provide several benefits such as real time transition of patient records and diagnostic reports between doctors thereby making instant access to specialist care to the community.

3. PROMOTING MULTI-SECTORAL APPROACH: While significant care and a clear technology enablement opportunity exist, they are all fragmented. Thus a unified healthcare delivery system over local Wi-Fi and Bluetooth technology, with monthly subscription fee can be employed. This includes e-prescriptions, e-pharmacy, scheduling appointments and fintech integration for payment flexibility through mobile technology. -This system might allow centralized procurement of primary health services in both urban and rural areas at a low cost footprint and in an effective manner.

Bridging Healthcare with Technology - A Roadmap:

Summary and Conclusion:

Primary healthcare clinics in India possess a very serious challenge in terms of patient satisfaction and quality healthcare needs to be addressed in order to improve healthcare services. There is a need to understand the strengths and challenges that bring or drive away the patient community from visiting primary healthcare clinics. There is a necessity to rectify and plan primary healthcare system to deliver best quality services to people, along with efficiency and effectiveness through qualified and sufficient healthcare staff. Thus, the success of primary healthcare system lies in allocating the existing potential to use and making appropriate structural changes.