

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT THE 45TH ANNUAL CONVOCATION OF AIIMS**

New Delhi, January 16, 2018

1. It is a matter of great happiness for me to be here for the 45th convocation ceremony of the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences or AIIMS. This institution is a national centre of excellence. In medical research and healthcare, it is a model for the country. The name “AIIMS” has become a byword for quality, commitment and rich experience. The faculty and doctors, as well as of course the students, are the pride of our medical fraternity and our nation. I must compliment every member of the AIIMS family for keeping up these exceptional standards, despite very difficult circumstances.

2. I am especially happy to address the students and residents – those energetic young doctors and nurses – who are graduating today and getting their degrees. My congratulations to them, and in particular to those who have won medals and awards. This is a landmark moment in your lives. You have joined an illustrious list of medical graduates and postgraduates from AIIMS. Your success is a result of your hard work, as well as the efforts of your teachers and professors – and the sacrifices of your families. In a large measure, it has also been assisted by society – which has contributed to the setting up and maintenance of an institution such as AIIMS.

3. As such, as you go into the world – a world that needs your services more than ever before – please remember that you need to give back to society. It is true that you need to be legitimately rewarded for your academic excellence, your medical skills and your expertise. Yet, as doctors, your services must be available both to those who can afford your fees and also to those who are less fortunate and cannot afford. Disease does not distinguish between rich and poor but unfortunately poor suffer the most. It is for society

to profit from medical science – it is not for medical science to profiteer from society.

4. Patients and their families have great trust in you and see you as next to God. It is upon you to ensure that the trust is given due respect and that you treat them with care and compassion.
5. A key role in meeting our health challenges is played by our very vigilant and very skilled nurses and paramedics. Their work almost never stops. Their sense of duty and compassion has made Indian nurses – both women and men – among the most outstanding professionals in our country, across all fields. In this context, I must make a special mention of the nursing students who are graduating today. My congratulations to all of you.
6. India is a country of paradoxes. Nowhere is this more apparent than in our public health. Traditional challenges such as diarrhoea, pneumonia and TB – along with maternal and child mortality figures that are improving but are still worrying – are a concern. On the other hand, non-communicable diseases and what are called life-style diseases are emerging as big killers. These could be related to the heart or to the brain, as well as to a host of cancers and pollution sources that we are increasingly exposed to.
7. In our country, both obesity and malnutrition are substantial public health issues. And in our country, we have a very large child population as well as one of the world's largest populations of senior people. Both these groups pose very different but very real challenges to our healthcare system and our doctors and nurses.
8. Despite the progress we have made, gaps remain. For example, Indian companies are among the world's biggest manufacturers of vaccines. These vaccines are supplied across the globe. Our innovative medical scientists have even developed new vaccines. Even so, our own immunisation record remains below desirable levels. Many of our children, particularly in far-flung and difficult-to-access areas, do not get the full course of immunisation. In this context, I must appreciate the efforts of the Union Ministry of Health

and Family Welfare, under Shri J.P. Nadda. By launching programmes like Mission Indradhanush, it is urgently trying to fill the immunisation gap and protect all our children – the future of our country – from killer diseases.

9. The scenario I have described above requires coordinated action by all stakeholders: Whether in the government or the private sector; whether at the grassroots, in the form of our dedicated ASHA workers and ANMs, or by specialists in leading referral hospitals such as AIIMS. The use of technology and the adoption of telemedicine, at least for diagnosis, will also go a long way in taking healthcare to those who need it most. Cutting-edge research in institutions such as AIIMS will be fundamental to taking on emerging diseases and health challenges.
10. In all this, the principal actors, the fulcrum of the medical system, are the doctors – all of you who are being awarded degrees today. Without you the system will not work. Led by you, it is for all of us to ensure that India's healthcare efforts reach every citizen and not just some citizens. It is for you to ensure that healthcare indices for the entire population reach acceptable levels during our lifetime. This is how the battle against polio, and earlier smallpox, was fought and won. Those victories must inspire us and spur us to a healthier India in all its dimensions.

Ladies and Gentlemen

11. I recognise that I am placing a big responsibility on the capable shoulders of our doctors. But I also acknowledge that our doctors need help. They need help in the form of more colleagues. And this is where we need a new regulatory system to enhance availability of doctors and medical professionals in our society. In the absence of this, the workload on our doctors is very high – I would say unrealistically high. I have no doubt that the hard-working doctors at AIIMS, who so diligently treat so many patients every day, will agree with me.

12. Currently our medical colleges, whether run by the government or private institutions, have only about 67,000 undergraduate seats and 31,000 postgraduate seats. In a country of 1.3 billion people this is highly inadequate. We have to overcome regulatory bottlenecks and interest groups that have prevented the growth of quality medical education in our country. This gives us far fewer medical graduates and postgraduates every year than our people need. It also leads to aspiring medical students seeking admission in colleges in other countries – simply because they have limited options at home.
13. You will agree that this is simply not acceptable. As a nation, we need to address this situation very urgently. We need to create more opportunities for those young people who want to make medicine their calling.
14. On that optimistic note, I would like to conclude. I would once again like to congratulate those who are being awarded their degrees today, as well as the exceptional AIIMS community. May all of you have many more years of service to medicine, to our nation and to humanity.

Thank you
Jai Hind!