

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
ON THE OCCASION OF INAUGURATION OF 'CENTRE OF
EXCELLENCE FOR SICKLE CELL ANAEMIA, THALASSEMIA
AND OTHER GENETIC BLOOD DISORDERS' AT PRATHIMA
INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL SCIENCES**

Karimnagar, December 22, 2018

1. I am happy to be here today in Karimnagar. Incidentally, this is my first visit to the city, which has a rich historical past, a vibrant present and plans for a smart future. I am particularly pleased that my first visit here is linked to a very important and meaningful occasion. I congratulate Prathima Institute of Medical Sciences for setting up a dedicated Centre for Sickle Cell Anaemia, Thalassemia and Other Genetic Blood Disorders.

2. Our country has made significant strides in the field of healthcare. Our doctors and paramedics are rated amongst the best in the world. Today, super-specialty hospitals are dotting the entire map of India. Many of our leading cities have emerged as preferred destinations for advanced medical treatment and medical tourism. Thanks to advancements in the medical field and improvement in standards of living, the average life expectancy in India has more than doubled since our independence.

3. While these are laudable achievements, we still have a long way to go in evolving a holistic healthcare system, one which is uniformly affordable and accessible to our citizens both in rural and urban areas. Strengthening public hospitals, municipal hospitals, charitable hospitals and primary health and wellness clinics must receive priority. This apart, we need to spread awareness on healthcare issues especially in rural areas and amongst disadvantaged sections of the society. This will be useful for managing and mitigating genetic blood disorders, which are particularly prevalent in tribal communities.

4. India has amongst the highest number of patients suffering from Sickle Cell Anaemia, Thalassemia and other genetic blood disorders. I am told that India has the largest number of children with Thalassemia major in the world. While around 1,50,000 children have Thalassemia major, there are millions of carriers who have the genetic trait for Thalassemia major.
5. Haemoglobinopathies are a major health problem. They place an emotional, psychological and economic burden on many families. Our healthcare apparatus and our medical professionals have to rise to the occasion and take all necessary steps to address this. The severity of these disorders manifests in children of 'healthy' carrier couples, and this makes their prevention and management a key public health issue. These disorders require lifelong treatment with repeated blood transfusions, chelating drugs and antibiotics and multidisciplinary management. In this context, I acknowledge the efforts of Prathima Institute of Medical Sciences for conceiving and launching a Centre dedicated to these disorders in a region having an acute need for such an institution.
6. Creating awareness among the target groups and their timely counselling is an important step towards addressing the problem. Imparting community education and awareness along with carrier screening and prenatal diagnosis, while paying attention to cultural, ethical, legal issues are essential components of a successful prevention program.
7. Our healthcare professionals, both from the private and public sector hospitals have to work closely with voluntary organizations and NGOs in the community to combat these diseases effectively. To ensure timely blood transfusion for the needy patients, there is also a need to encourage a Blood Donation culture and dispel any misinformation associated with donating blood. Business houses, as part of their CSR initiatives can also come forward to fund the treatment of patients.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. Our healthcare challenges are numerous and so are our achievements. The Ayushman Bharat initiative aims to ensure that nobody is deprived of healthcare due to lack of financial resources. Three months ago, on September 23, the Ayushman Bharat – Pradhan Mantri Jan Aarogya Yojana, which provides health protection cover to poor and vulnerable families, was launched. I am happy to note that within the first 3 months itself, over 6 lakh persons needing secondary or tertiary care have been admitted to hospitals across the country and an amount of Rs. 800 crore has been authorised for their treatment. No longer should a poor father have to sell his small home to treat his ailing daughter and no longer should a mother need to worry about funding her son's treatment. Ayushman Bharat can help fulfil our dream of "Swasthya Bharat Sabal Bharat".
9. However, a major onus for achieving this dream shall be on our doctors. 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.
10. Some of the young doctors received their well earned Gold Medals today. Notably, all of them were girls. Our girl students seem to be outperforming the boy students. This is a welcome trend that I have been noticing across the country. I wish you all the best for your future career. The nation looks up to our medical students and young doctors with great hope and confidence. You have to take the country's healthcare sector to the next level and make 'health for all' a reality.
11. I wish you and the institute all the best for future endeavours.

Thank You
Jai Hind!