

## **Medical services in TN nonpareil: Yet there're miles to go**



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The health of people is a major factor behind a country's economic development. To ensure the people's sound health, it is the government's responsibility to provide medical facilities of standard quality and give priority to disease preventive measures. In that respect, Tamil Nadu stands front and center in the country, equipped with the best infrastructure in government hospitals and the best facilities for modern treatment methods.

Tamil Nadu is far ahead in the health index in the country, thanks to its most efficient medical infrastructure including government medical colleges, the government multi-purpose super-specialty hospital, primary health centres and the urban community centres. The state equipped with more number of medical beds has set an example worth emulation by other states in maintaining public health, particularly the health of women and children.

**The miles ahead**

The DMK government launched medical schemes – ‘Makkalai Thedi Maruthuvam’ (Medicine at the doorsteps of the People) on August 5, 2021 and ‘Nammai Kaakkum 48 – Innuyir Kaapom’ (Scheme for saving victims in 48 hours of accident) on Dec.18, 2022.

The limit for annual income of beneficiaries of the CM’s Comprehensive Medical Insurance Scheme has been raised from Rs.72,000 to Rs.1,20,00. As a result, not only the economically weaker sections but also the middle-class people benefit from the scheme in the government hospitals. There are, though, miles to go as per the demands of the world health standard.

### **Super-specialty treatments**

Of course, now Tamil Nadu tops in organ transplantation. But such advanced operations are performed only in private hospitals. In most cases, organs are donated from the brain-dead victims of road accidents. Yet it is the government hospitals which receive such donated organs and supply them to private hospitals. So, the GHs serve as receivers of organs but don’t perform transplant operations. The organ transplants done in private hospitals are quite expensive and the patients have to shell out lakhs of rupees. Hence such transplants are out of bounds for the needy yet less privileged patients. For a state that has earned laurels for topping in the country in the health index, the fact that there is no facility in the GHs for organ transplants seems not to add up to the state’s glory.

Next, private artificial fertility centres have mushroomed all over the country. The expenditure involved in this kind of treatment for infertility is quite unimaginable for the ordinary people. So, the government has a responsibility to help the ordinary families solve their problem of infertility. So, artificial fertility clinics must be set up in the GHs. As the specialists for this branch of medicine are in short supply, the obstetricians in the GHs can be trained and used for the purpose.

## **Govt. must produce medicine**

After the DMK came to power in 2021, it proposed to the Union Government that the vaccine for Corona virus shall be manufactured in Chennai itself. Likewise, if the government itself manufactures medicine for distribution in the GHs, it will go down well with the common people. For most of the annual funds allocations for the Health department are spent only on purchasing medicine. At present the government procures medicine from the private pharmaceutical companies. There are malpractices common in this exercise which must anyhow be prevented.

Similarly, the government itself can manufacture clinical equipment required in the GHs through the industrial parks in Tamil Nadu.

## **Promises yet to be fulfilled**

Now, under the DMK regime, the infrastructure including beds, oxygen supply etc. has been upgraded in the urban government hospitals. But the rural PHCs leave much to be desired. Complaints are galore over them. They have no waiting rooms, suffer with shortage of doctors and no ambulance facility.

The DMK said in its election manifesto: "Medical vacancies will be filled; the personnel appointed on contract and on the temporary basis during the previous regime will be regularized and their remuneration enhanced." Yet all these promises are yet to be fulfilled.

The upgraded PHCs offer a variety of clinical treatments including normal delivery. But all these procedures are performed only by general practitioners. In case there are complicated deliveries, private specialists are roped in to deal with such cases. But sometimes it so happens that the specialists are not available in time. In such critical hours, the patients are urgently sent to the

urban hospitals, with the risk to both mothers and to-be-born infants. To avert the risky and critical situations, it is better to have the PHCs equipped with gynecologists, obstetricians, pediatricians and anesthetists. The initiative will go a long way in reducing the mother and infant mortality rates. The workload on the urban hospitals will also come down.

### **Required measures**

Generally snake bites are more common in villages. But the anti-venom medicine is available only in the urban hospitals. So, the anti-venom and other anti-poison treatments must be made available in the PHCs. Besides, blood banks must be set up at the PHCs to facilitate blood transfusion for mothers during childbirth. Vehicles must be arranged for doctors and nurses to go on field study in the afternoons.

To implement all these growth measures, the funds as much as allocated last year will hardly be enough. It was announced at the DMK conference that the allocations for the health sector would be trebled. It will be better if the promise is kept in this year's budget. And then the government hospitals will function more efficiently. A situation may be created wherein all political leaders, ministers and officials turn to the GHs for clinical treatments as in the past.

This is the expectation at present from all stake-holders concerned. Will the government measure up to the expectation?

**Translated by V. Mariappan.**