What is Health Technology Assessment (HTA)?

- HTA is a process of critical assessment (examining and reporting) of various properties of any medical technology used in health care.
- Its primary objective is to provide “Value for money” to the patients.
- HTA focuses on two major questions: clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness.

Implementation of HTA can provide realistic solutions to many of the major challenges that affect the Indian healthcare system:

Challenges in Indian Healthcare System

- Public healthcare system is crowded, unhygienic, lacks adequate qualified staff.
- Private healthcare sector is highly expensive.
- Burden of healthcare expenditure continues to increase.
- The out-of-pocket (OOP) spending of healthcare in India is as high as 82.2%, and 74.7% of this is spent on medicines.
- Large medical expenses → catastrophic payments and financial toxicity → Many families are driven below poverty line every year.
- Widespread negligence to the formulary concept.
- Prescription from allopathic practitioner not mandatory for a patient to obtain prescription-only drugs in India.
- Despite high volume of good quality pharmaceutical production in India, healthcare costs keep increasing.

Current Medical Expenditure Model in India

- Patient fails II
- Consults a private practitioner.
- Practitioner orders diagnostic tests that (s)he feels are required for diagnosis.
- Practitioner prescribes medicines that (s)he feels are required for that condition.
- Patient spends for diagnosis, treatment and consultation fees from his pocket.

Government Counter Measures are Ineffective

- Generic prescribing → choice of the brand of a particular drug gets shifted from the informed doctor to the pharmacist → abundant scope of widespread corruption.
- Too stringent price regulation → reduced drug sale income to pharmaceutical companies → discouraged from involving in R&D.
- A company producing a cheaper version of a drug might compromise on the quality of its product.
- OPPI and IPA have moved to the High Courts, challenging the latest DPCO order to impose price regulation.

What do the Stakeholders in Healthcare Delivery Chain Actually Want?

- Government: All the people in India should get access to quality healthcare, and at affordable costs. Healthcare facilities should be of good quality, and affordable.
- People: Pharmaceutical industry: Profitable revenue should be generated from sales of their product so that R&D can be supported towards novel medicines, devices and diagnostic methods.

How can the Implementation of Insurance Funded Model Provide Realistic Solutions to Healthcare Sector Problems?

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<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Solution</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ordering of unwanted diagnostic tests and drugs by prescribers → Increased OOP spending by patients</td>
<td>Prescribers will be compelled to order only those diagnostic tests and prescribe only those drugs which are approved by insurance provider.</td>
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<td>Pharmaceutical companies lure prescribers to prescribe their drug brands</td>
<td>Pharmaceutical companies will have to convince the insurance providers that their product is different and unique; prescribers can prescribe only those drugs approved by insurance provider.</td>
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<td>Pharmacists dispense dangerous drugs without prescription</td>
<td>Pharmacist payment also comes from insurance companies → drug dispensing without prescription fails.</td>
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<td>AYUSH practitioners prescribe allopathic drugs despite not having thorough knowledge</td>
<td>Prescriptions from authorized prescribers only will be reimbursed → cross-system practicing will reduce.</td>
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<td>Formulary concept neglected</td>
<td>Hospitals will have to develop up-to-date formularies in collaboration with the insurance providers → National formulary will have to be brought out more regularly and more frequently.</td>
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Reality Check: Health Insurance is not Popular in India

- Despite the presence of ESIS and CGHS, the penetration of health insurance has remained low: only one-fourth of the country’s population is covered by some sort of a health insurance scheme.
- The existing insurance schemes in India are also ridden with flaws and shortcomings.

For the insurance funded model to work properly, a strong and effective HTA system has to be in place.

Status of HTA in India

- India lacks a commendable HTA programme.
- India remains one of the few major countries in the world where a strong HTA system is not in place.
- Many of the stakeholders in HTA are unaware of the whole concept.
- Since an adequate HTA practice is not in place in India, adequate health economic evidence is lacking in many areas.
- Policy making in India frequently depends on intuition and anecdotal experience, rather than on the evidence-based model.

HTA in India: Future Challenges

- High Level Expert Group report on Universal Health Coverage by the Planning Commission of India has highlighted the need for using economic evidence for policymaking in India.
- NICE International (UK), SIGNET initiative (Singapore), ISPOR-Indian chapter, HTA International, and PHI have all organized workshops and conferences in order to provide sensitization in the branch of HTA to Indian policy makers and senior clinicians.
- Government of India has recently collaborated with the NICE for developing a HTA board in India.
- Government of India is expected to launch a new social welfare scheme for health sector termed the National Health Assurance Mission.

Summary and Conclusion

The proper introduction of HTA assessment in the Indian healthcare system has the potential to realize the dream of delivering affordable and quality healthcare to the entire Indian population.

References