
UNIT 19 PRIMARY HEALTH CARE-I: CONCEPT AND ORGANISATION

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19.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit tells about the traditional and modern concepts of health. Reading through this unit will help you to know about the concept of Primary Health Care, its characteristic features and how the concept is related to development. The main points of Alma Ata Declaration, in which several countries in the world committed themselves to make efforts to achieve a minimal level of health care for their citizens by 2000 A.D. through the Primary Health Care approach in the delivery of health care services is the highlight of the unit.

Objectives

After studying this unit, you would be able to :

- define health and Primary Health Care, and
- describe main characteristics of Primary Health Care concept.

19.2 HEALTH AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR HEALTH

Traditionally health has been viewed in its narrow connotation—an absence of disease. However, with growing advancement and understanding of various spheres, it has now been universally acknowledged that health has much wider ramifications and should be perceived in its holistic perspective. This has been reflected in the definition of health given by the World Health Organisation as “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely an absence of disease or infirmity”.

You might remember reading about the different components of health earlier. Let us quickly go through them again. *Physical health* is an important component of total health. In good physical health the individual has a good complexion, clean skin, bright eyes, lustrous hair, firm flesh, good appetite, sound sleep, regular activity of bowel and bladder, and coordinated movements of body. *Mentally healthy* person feels satisfied with himself, he is well adjusted and has good self control. The concept of *social health* connotes abilities such as those of making satisfying and lasting friendships, assuming responsibilities in accordance with one's capacities, showing socially considerate behavior and living effectively with others.

The constitution of India envisages that the state shall regard the raising of the level of nutrition and standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties. This has resulted in a greater degree of state involvement in the establishment of nationwide health system of health care services in the country. The term *health care services includes not only the public health services, but also medical care, and related education and research.*

The health care services developed correspond to the health problems of the community. This brings us to the crucial question what are the common health problems in our country? By now you should be able to enlist them. Let us briefly discuss each one of them.

Common Health Problems in India

The common health problems in India include :

- i) *Nutritional Disorders* : Nearly 80 per cent of the children below the age of five years are undernourished. 50 per cent of all pregnant and lactating women have nutritional anaemia. Vitamin A deficiency is a major problem in 1-3 years age group children. Iodine deficiency disorders affect nearly 54 million people in India.
- ii) *Communicable Diseases* : Malaria, Tuberculosis, Leprosy, Filaria, Cholera etc. are few of communicable diseases which causes illnesses in the community.
- iii) *Environmental Sanitation Problems*: Lack of safe drinking water in many areas of the country and unsafe methods of excreta disposal increases the risk of infection and infestation. Unsanitary practice are the most common causes of disease and death specially among children and women.

We have just gone through the common health problems affecting people in our country. In addition to these problems the increasing population of our country is posing yet another health problem. Every year nearly 15 million people are added to our population.

What is the government's response to these problems? What are the health care facilities provided? Who are the health care functionaries working towards improving health? The following discussion answers these questions:

19.2.1 Different Levels of Health Care

Health care is provided at three levels namely :

- i) *Primary level of Health Care* : The most peripheral level of health care is called primary level health care (Figure 19.1). In India a team of village level functionaries namely village guide, trained dai, male and female multipurpose worker provide primary level health care services to the community. Most of the common health problems in the developing countries can be managed by appropriately trained para-medical workers like those mentioned above functioning at the village level. You will learn about these functionaries in unit 20 section 20.3.
- ii) *Secondary level of Health Care* : There are only few health problems which require the services of professionals. This level of health care is called secondary level of health care. These services are provided through primary health centers, Community health centers, district hospitals etc. Figure 19.1 gives information regarding the population covered by this level of health care and corresponding expenditure incurred on it.
- iii) *Tertiary level of Health Care* : Very few health conditions requires highly specialised type of health care services which are provided through sophisticated hospitals like state hospitals and medical college hospital, national institutes etc. This level of healthcare is called tertiary level of health care which covers only one per cent population (Figure 19.1).

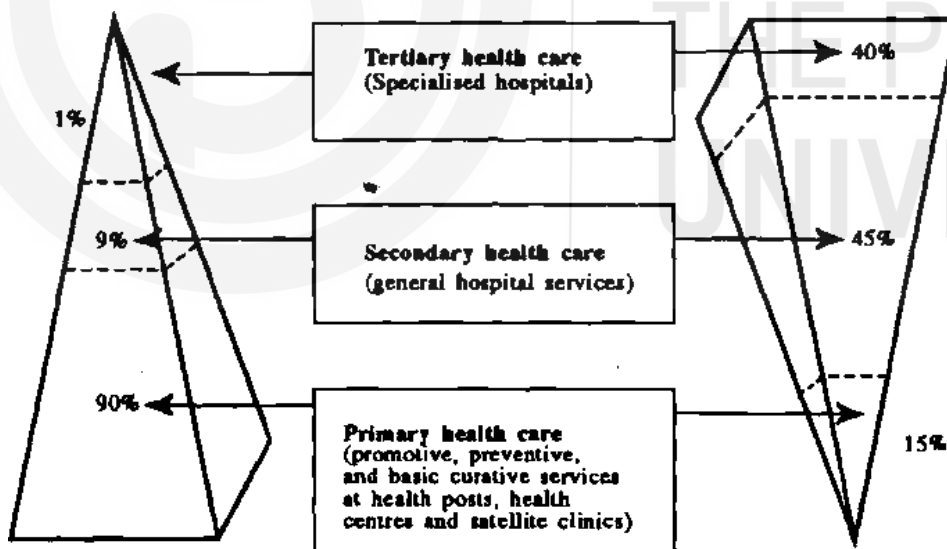


Fig 19.1: Levels of Health Care

From our discussion above it is evident that the effort of our government is to provide effective and comprehensive health care for all segments of the population. To improve on their services the government has adopted the Alma Ata Declaration and is working towards providing health for all by the year 2000 A.D. What is Alma Ata Declaration? Read the following discussion to gain knowledge on this.

19.2.2 Alma Ata Declaration

The Health Assembly of the World Health Organisation (WHO) adopted resolutions in 1976, concerning the provision and promotion of effective comprehensive health care for all people and expressed the need to hold an international conference to exchange experiences on the development of Primary Health Care. The conference was held in Alma Ata, the capital of the erstwhile Kazakh state of Soviet Socialist Republic in 1978. The Intergovernmental conference was attended by delegations from 134 governments and by representatives of 67 United Nations Organisations, specialised agencies, and nongovernmental organisation.

The conference ended with the following declaration:

- i) The conference strongly reaffirms that health, which is a state of complete physical, mental and social well being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, is a fundamental human right and the attainment of the highest possible level of health is a most important worldwide social goal.
- ii) The existing gross inequality in the health status of the people is politically, socially, and economically unacceptable and is, therefore, of common concern to all countries.
- iii) Economic and social development is of basic importance to the fullest attainment of health for all and to the reduction of the gap between the health status of the developing and developed countries.
- iv) The people have the right and duty to participate individually and collectively in the planning and implementation of their health care.
- v) Governments have a responsibility for the health of their people which can be fulfilled only by the provision of adequate health and social measures. A main social target of Governments, international organisations and the whole world community in the coming decades should be the attainment of a level of health by all people of the world by the year 2000 that will permit them to lead a socially and economically productive life.
- vi) Primary health care is the key to attain this target.
- vii) All governments should formulate national policies, strategies and plans of action to launch and sustain primary health care as part of comprehensive national health system.
- viii) All countries should cooperate in a spirit of partnership and service to ensure primary health care for all people.
- ix) An acceptable level of health for all the people of the world by the year 2000 can be attained through a fuller and better use of the world's resources.

Our government abides by this declaration. Based on this, a national health policy has been formulated. The policy is described in the following sub-section.

19.2.3 National Health Policy

To achieve the optimal utilization of resources and co-ordinate efforts of different departments and ministries participating in promotion of health of community members, the Government of India developed a National Health Policy in 1983. The policy was revised in the year 2002, in view of the developments in field of health and improvement in the national economy, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare modified the NHP. The main strategy advocated continues to implementation of the Primary Health Care approach. It emphasizes that decentralized public health system should be implemented with convergence of all health programs under one umbrella. The salient highlights of the new national health policy are as follows:

- Improving Public Health Infrastructure
- Extending Public Health Services to community
- Human Resource Development for delivery of health care
- Increase in number of Medical and Dental Colleges
- Increase in facilities for specialization in Public Health and Family Medicine
- Increase in Nursing Personnel
- Efficient Delivery of National Public Health Programmes
- Involvement of Non-Government Organizations for delivery of health care
- Involvement of Private Sector for delivery of health care
- Improving supplies of Drugs and Vaccines
- Participation of Supportive Sectors in delivery of health care
- Priority for Population stabilization
- Inter-sectoral Contribution to Health
- Improving Information Education Communication in delivery of health care
- Improvement in Medical Ethics and Legislation to improve health
- Developing Norms for Health Care Personnel
- Regulation of Standards in Education of personnel in Paramedical Disciplines
- Enforcement of Quality of Standards for Food and Drugs
- Development of National Disease Surveillance System and documentation of Health Statistics
- Improving Health research
- Improving Urban Health
- High priority to be accorded to Mental Health and Women's Health
- Environment Health and Occupation Health to be given priority

- Development of Medical Facilities for Overseas Users
- Developing medical facilities and health care in country keeping global development in the world

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1) List the different dimensions of health.

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2) What are the three main health problems in our country?

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3) List the health workers involved at the primary levels of health care.

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4) List any five highlights of the National Health Policy.

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19.3 PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

The Alma Ata Declaration, you learnt, strongly recommended the development of primary health care for all people. What is the concept of Primary Health Care? We will learn about this in the next section.

There is wide gap between the health status of population in the different countries and the developing world. This gap is also evident within the individual developing countries between the health of “haves” and “have nots”.

A better health status of community can be achieved with the technical knowledge available. Unfortunately in most countries this knowledge is not

being put to the best advantage. Health resources are being allocated mainly to sophisticated medical institutions in the urban areas. Indeed, the improvement of health is being equated with the provision of medical care through sophisticated hospitals. At the same time, disadvantaged groups have no access to any permanent form of health care. Even when the health facilities are located within easy reach, they are unable to pay or the cultural taboos put them out of bounds. Moreover, most of the developing countries have developed their health care delivery system based on the western model. Thus most conventional health care systems are becoming increasingly complex, costly and have doubtful social relevance.

So what is the alternative with the limited money available? The primary health care is the answer to this problem. The Primary Health Care approach is cost-effective, and has great impact on the health problems of the community but it is difficult to introduce, On the other hand the specialized health care is easy to introduce but it is expensive and has little effect on the health problems. Let us understand the primary health care approach.

Primary Health Care is an approach to achieve an acceptable level of health at reasonable cost throughout the world in a foreseeable future (Figure 19.2). The World Health Organization defines primary health care as: "Essential health care, made universally accessible to individuals and families in the community in an acceptable and affordable way with their full participation". This approach has evolved over the years, partly in light of the experiences, positive and negative, gained in delivery of health care services in a number of countries.

Primary Health Care addresses to the main health problems in the community, providing promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative services. In order to make health care universally accessible, involvement of communities in planning, organization and management is essential and this mobilization can be done through appropriate education.

The primary health care is most effective and economical, if it is delivered through health workers selected from the local community and trained properly considering the community health problems and its expressed health needs. These community health workers should have the support of the existing Government health system.

Since health cannot be attained by the health sector alone appropriate measures are required from other sectors for economic development, food production, water, sanitation, housing and education.

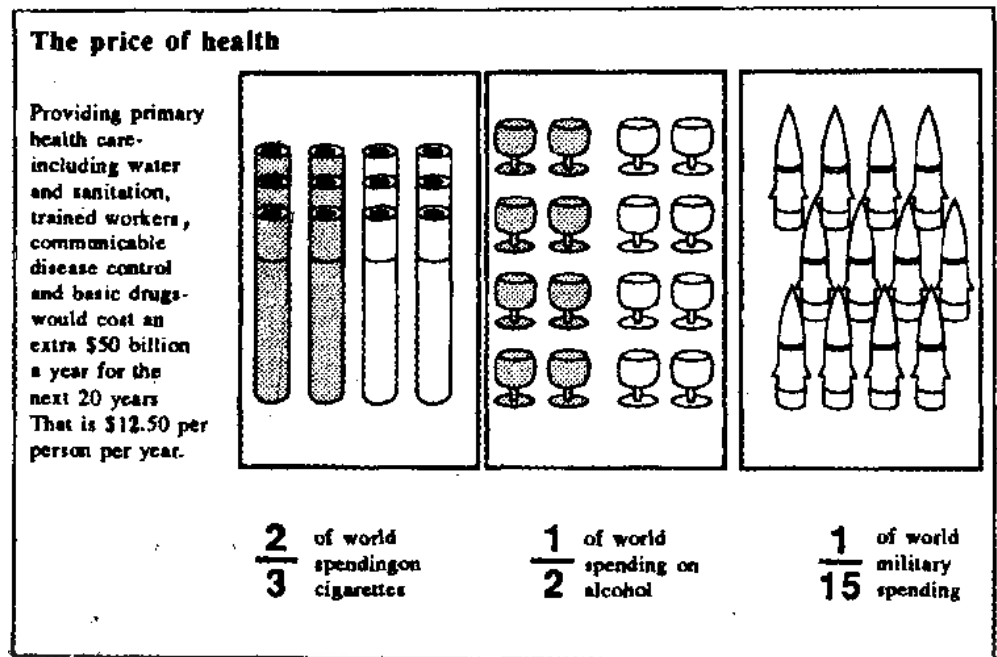


Fig. 19.2 ; The Price of Health

Political commitment of Primary Health Care should also be forthcoming which implies support from the government and community leaders. It also requires reorientation of the national health development strategies and transfer of a greater share of health resources to the underserved majority of the population.

The basic characteristics of Primary Health Care are listed in the following section.

19.3.1 Characteristics of Primary Health Care

Given below are the characteristic features of the primary health care :

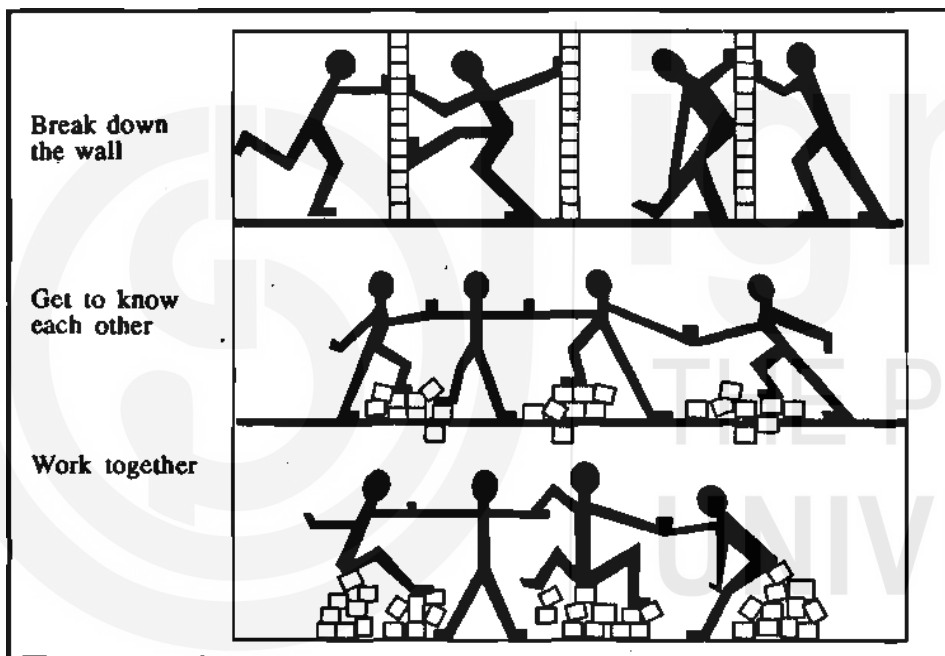
- i) It is essential health care which is based on practical scientifically sound and socially acceptable methods and technology.
- ii) It should be rendered universally acceptable to the individuals and families in the community through their full participation.
- iii) Its availability should be at a cost which the community and country can afford.
- iv) It addresses to the main health problems in the community, providing preventive, promotive, curative and rehabilitative services.
- v) It requires, in addition to the health sector, all related sectors of community development.
- vi) It requires and promotes maximum community and individual self-reliance and their participation in the planning, organisation and implementation, making full use of local resources.
- vii) It has the integrated and functional referral system.

viii) It relies on local referral to health workers and community workers, suitably trained to work as health team and to respond to the expressed health needs of the community.

After understanding the concept of primary health care, you can very well visualise how providing good health can go a long way in improving life and good living. The discussion in the next Section 19.3.2 further highlights the relationship between health and development.

19.3.2 Primary Health Care and Development

Development implies progressive improvements in the living conditions and quality of life enjoyed by society and shared by its members. It is a continuous process. Only when people have an acceptable level of health they can enjoy the benefits, of development. Since primary health care is the key to attaining an acceptable level of health by all, it helps people to contribute to their own social and economic development.



As an example, the control of diseases by primary health care approach would help to promote development in general. Proper nutrition and reduction of sickness would increase work productivity. Breaking the vicious cycle of malnutrition and infection improves the physical and mental development of the child.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1) Define Primary Health Care.

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2) List the four services to be provided by primary health care.

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19.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have learnt the concept of health and primary health care. Health has much wider dimensions in the areas of physical, mental and social well-being rather than merely the absence of disease. The primary health care concept is an alternative approach to the delivery of health services to the community, in a much more economic and effective manner with full involvement of local communities.

The unit also discussed the various characteristics of Primary Health care and it described the international efforts made in this concept as Alma Ata declaration.

19.5 GLOSSARY

Community	A group of people living in a defined geographical area.
Community Participation	It is a process in which the people living in a defined geographical area identify goals, plan and implement programmes to meet the decided goals..
Community Health Problems	The main health problems of the community.
Curative Services	The services which are provided to the diseased person to cure his disease, for example services provided in hospitals to patients.
Essential health care	The minimal level of health care provided to a person which would enable him to lead a socially and economically productive life.
Health care delivery services	The health care services provided to the community. It may be governmental or nongovernmental.
Preventive, service	The health care services provided to the community which prevent the occurrence of diseases, such as vaccinations given to children.
Promotive services	The services provided to the members of the community to promote health and healthy habits.
Referral Services	The services available at the next higher level health institutions.
World Health Organisation	The United Nations Agency working in the area of health with headquarters at Geneva.

19.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Primary Health
Care-I:
Concept and
Organisation

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- i) Physical, Mental, Social.
- ii) Nutritional deficiency disorders, Communicable diseases, Environmental Sanitation
- iii) ASHA
Trained Dai
Village health guide
Multipurpose worker (male and female)
- iv) Increase in nursing personnel
Priority for population stabilization
Improving health research
Improving urban health

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) Essential health care made universally accessible to individuals and families in the community in an acceptable and affordable way with their full participation
- 2) Promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative.

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