Message from MD's Desk

UN’s universal declaration of human rights ascertains the assurance of the highest attainable standards of health as one of the fundamental rights of every human being. A comprehensive approach will ensure an ubiquitous access to quality health care and services. The vision laid the seed of RMNCH+A program which forms a grid for reproductive, maternal, child, neonatal and adolescent health. Our struggle with gender gaps in terms of female access to education, empowerment, agency and autonomy can be solved by robust health-specific and multi-sectoral policies which would facilitate an environment conducive to health promotion. Prudently devised strategies and guidelines for public-private partnerships, quality assurance systems for education and training, clinical guidelines for each period along the continuum of care and high quality data information for RMNCH planning and evaluation would form a crucial foundation for an extensive health care management. Team Astron is committed to leave its mark on the road towards achieving this goal.

We wish all our patrons a great year ahead. May the year bring a new era of happiness, prosperity and good health and peace to you all. We at Astron are devoted to initiate new chapters on achieving our mission of Astronomical quality for healthcare through our efforts in the fields of skill enhancement through our new endeavour “Astron Institute of Social Sciences”

Dr. Y P Bhatia, Managing Director

RMNCH+A

“Healthy Mother and Healthy Child for a Healthy India”

The Millennium Development Goal targets to reduce child mortality (MDG 4) and maternal mortality (MDG 5). Despite advancements in access and quality of care through local and global initiatives, there is a long way to go in the progress of maternal and new-born healthcare in the developing nations.

A follow up to Summit on ‘Global Child Survival Call to Action: A Promise to Keep’ in Washington DC in June 2012, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, organized the ‘Call to Action: For Every Child in India’. In this summit, national and international experts across all sections of the society came forward to work for the common target towards the success of maternal, newborn and child survival and development programmes. RMNCH+A approach was launched in 2013. Since then, RMNCH+A has become heart of GOI’s flagship public health program, the National Health Mission.

The RMNCH+A strategy approaches include:

- Health systems strengthening (HSS) focusing on infrastructure, human resource, supply chain management, and referral transport measures.
- Prioritization of high-impact interventions for various life-cycle stages. Inclusion of adolescence as a distinct ‘life stage’ in the overall strategy.
• Integrated monitoring and accountability through good governance, use of available data sets, community involvement, and steps to address grievances.
• Broad-based collaboration and partnerships with ministries, departments, development partners, civil society, and other stakeholders.

The priorities under adolescent health include nutrition, sexual and reproductive health, mental health, addressing gender-based violence, non-communicable diseases and substance use. The RMNCH+A approach also encompasses the needs of previously under-served groups, including urban poor, and tribal populations.

GOI with support from nodal agency and other development partners, has taken the following important steps to introduce and support RMNCH+A implementation.

- It has identified 184 high-priority districts (HPDs) across 29 states. A district-level gap analysis and facility assessment approach was designed using standardized tools.
- To ensure a consensus on the approach, the MOHFW prepared guidelines and technical documents which were used in state and district consultations with development and other partners.
- The RMNCH+A 5 x 5 Matrix identified five high-impact interventions across each of the five thematic areas, five cross-cutting and health systems strengthening interventions, and, the minimum essential commodities across each of the thematic areas. It is an important tool for explaining the strategy in simple terms, organizing technical support, and monitoring progress with the states and HPDs.
- Development partners were engaged in need-based, district-level assistance and collaborate with district- and block-level stakeholders to identify and systematically address key bottlenecks.
- Scoreboards and dashboards assisted by Health Management Information System (HMIS) were introduced to manage huge data across states, districts and blocks.

Astron, as an operational partner, conducted a detailed gap assessment of the health care services in 33 high priority districts spread across six states with the objective of assessing the current infrastructure, human resource, equipment, capacity, quality, resource availability needed to deliver a set of key RMNCH+A interventions in facilities and communities and also assess the health system capacities. The recommendations called for an integrated restoration of the network of infrastructure and health workers at the ground level which would result in the concrete augmentation of maternal and child health care.
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At Public Health front Astron collaborates with Ernst & Young LLP. Academic alliances with National Institute of Health Sciences, Sri Lanka and Indian Society for Training & Development, Gurgaon chapter.

International collaboration with Apollo Medversity on promoting academics at global platform.
The UN estimates that two-thirds of the under-five deaths in Southern Asia occur in India, which has the highest number of under-five deaths in the world (1.3 million in 2013). Source: UNICEF report 2014-Levels & Trends in Child Mortality

High coverage with optimal breast feeding practices has the potential to prevent 1.4 million under-five deaths, yet rates of exclusive breast feeding are only 39 per cent in developing countries. Source: UNICEF Nutrition Report 2014

Globally about 75 per cent of all households consumed adequately iodized salt in 2013, still more than 35 million newborns were at risk of iodine deficiency disorders in 2013. Source: UNICEF Nutrition Report 2014

Poor sanitation, thus exposing the children to bacteria, is the biggest root for India’s malnutrition. Lack of proper toilets at home, forces 620 million people in India either to use public toilet or defecate in the open. Source: WHO Water sanitation health report.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT