Compassion in Primary Health Care

For Prelims: **World Health Organization**, **Health and Wellness Centres**, **Ayushman Bharat**, **Tele MANAS**

For Mains: Role of Compassion and Ethics in Public Service Delivery, Primary Health Care Reforms in India

Source:TH

Why in News?

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** released a report titled *"Compassion and primary health care(PHC)"* *which* highlights compassion as key to improving PHC and addressing rising mental health challenges through patient-centered and dignified care.

What is the Significance of Compassion in PHC?

- **About:** Compassion in PHC is the recognition of **human suffering coupled with the motivation and action to alleviate** it within the context of essential health services.
    - It is not just a moral value but a practical driver that enhances the quality, accessibility, and equity of care.
- **Significance:** Compassion differs from **sympathy and empathy.** Sympathy is passive and pity-driven, while empathy can cause **emotional fatigue.**
    - In contrast, compassion combines emotional connection with thoughtful action, making it a more sustainable and effective approach in health care.
- **Role in Healthcare:** The lifetime prevalence of **mental disorders** in India is **13.7%**, and 15% of India's adult population experiences mental health issues.
    - WHO estimates that the **burden of mental health problems in India is 2443 disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) per 10000 populatio**n. The economic loss due to mental health conditions, between **2012-2030, is estimated at USD 1.03 trillion.**
    - In India 70% to 92% of people with **mental disorders do not receive proper treatment due** to lack of awareness, stigma, and shortage of professionals.
        - With rising cases of depression and anxiety, compassion has become a vital component in healthcare. It promotes people-centred care by making services more responsive, respectful, and holistic.
        - Moreover, compassion strengthens the entire health continuum spanning prevention, health promotion, treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care, ensuring that care delivery is both effective and empathetic.
    - Compassion fosters **inclusive care**, especially for Dalits, Adivasis, **LGBTQ+** individuals, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised groups.

Case Studies Related to Compassionate Healthcare

- **ASHA Worker Responding to Domestic Violence:**
    - **Key Actor:** ASHA worker Praveena Ben
    - **Ethical Lens:** ASHA workers extended her roles beyond maternal health to address domestic violence, a deeply sensitive and stigmatized issue.
        - She upheld the dignity and autonomy of survivors by ensuring private referrals and trauma-informed care.
- **Tamil Nadu's Disaster-Ready PHCs:**
    - **Ethical Lens:** Tamil Nadu's health system showcases anticipatory ethical governance by training PHC staff for disaster response.
        - Its interdepartmental coordination ensures swift, humane action during crises, while prioritizing ethical resource allocation to protect the most vulnerable.
- **Clinical Courage in Tribal Areas:**
    - **Key Actor:** Dr. Vidith Panchal, Amrit Clinic (NGO: Basic Health Services).
    - **Ethical Lens:** Despite poor infrastructure and limited support, Dr. Panchal chose to treat a **critically ill TB patient**, Tukaram, locally instead of referring him to a distant hospital prioritizing the patient's dignity and comfort over administrative convenience.
        - Acted with beneficence and compassion, providing comfort and **reducing suffering in end-of-life care.**

What Can Be Done to Enhance Compassionate Healthcare in India?

- **Institutionalise Compassion:** The **National Health Policy, 2017** emphasizes the need for **people-centred and ethical provisioning** of healthcare.
    - To strengthen this approach, compassion should be integrated as a measurable dimension of **Quality of Care (QoC),** alongside efficiency and effectiveness.
    - Mandate **Compassion Checklists** in **Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs)** under **Ayushman Bharat** to improve patient-provider interaction.
- **Enhance capacity of HWCs**: Training health workers in **trauma-informed and culturally sensitive care.**
    - Train **Accredited Social Health Activists** and **Auxiliary Nurse Midwives** in compassionate communication, especially while addressing domestic violence, abuse, adolescent health and mental distress
- **Integrate Compassion Metrics in Audits:** The **15th Finance Commission** recommended outcome-based health grants, aligning with this, compassion scores from patient feedback systems can be integrated into outcomes.
    - This approach ensures that healthcare providers are incentivized for compassionate healthcare
    - **NITI Aayog's Vision 2035** emphasizes people-first data systems, ensuring ethical data collection and respectful community engagement.
- **Reform Curriculum:** Introduce modules on **compassionate leadership**, grief counselling, and end-of-life communication.
- **Mental Health Interventions: Tele MANAS**, now operational in 20+ languages and having responded to 1.8 million calls, should embed **empathy training modules** for first-level responders.
    - Adopt strategies that promote **home visits, maternal counselling**, and community health dialogue.

Drishti Mains Question:

 Discuss the importance of compassion as a measurable dimension in Primary Health Care. How can India institutionalise compassion in its healthcare delivery systems?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Mains

Q. In order to enhance the prospects of social development, sound and adequate health care policies are needed particularly in the fields of geriatric and maternal health care.Discuss. **(2020)**

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