

# DOCTORS FOR A NEW CENTURY

Forget curriculum. Look at the health needs of people and of the system to chart out what medical students should be taught, say public health professionals

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India needs 1.5 million doctors to take care of the health of its 1.2 billion citizens. But there is just one doctor for every 2,000 now.

While the health ministry talks of luring medical students to villages, the Planning Commission proposes FDI in medical education. The nation waits anxiously for the war of words to translate into action.

In the meantime, a six-year-old public health think-tank teamed up with a 100-year-old veteran in Delhi on March 12 to chart out a new course for new-millennium medical schools. Health professionals of India's premier public health think-tank, Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), joined their peers from the Harvard School of Public Health, US, with Dean and global public health leader, Dr Julio Frenk, delivering the PHFI foundation day lecture: 'Transforming health professional education for the 21st century.'

As an antidote to the world's health woes, Frenk proposes a change in the basic thinking about health education. In the last 100 years, medical science was taught in a uniform manner worldwide. Today, health education needs a different approach. "People's needs should be the basis of health education, with curriculum as the end point, not the beginning." A critical factor in improving health outcomes would be a radical change in health workforce culture—from training methodology and content to how doctors envision success. From skilled experts and ethical professionals, medical education needs to move towards "transformative learning", with doctors as leaders and change agents, working closely in teams and with global networks of knowledge.

"It's particularly relevant for India," says Dr K.S. Reddy, director of PHFI. Rural Development Minister Jairam Ramesh and the Union Health Secretary, P.K. Pradhan, agreed on this. Time to look forward to some action on the ground.

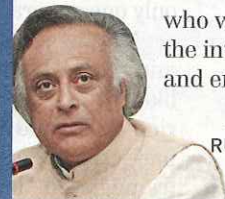
"Health is about people, those who need care and those who are entrusted by society to take care of them."

**DR JULIO FRENK**  
DEAN, HARVARD SCHOOL  
OF PUBLIC HEALTH



"We need to create a cadre of professionals who would work at the interface of health and environment."

**JAIRAM RAMESH**  
RURAL DEVELOPMENT  
MINISTER



"Interdisciplinary learning and health system connectivity are the mantras of new-age medical education."

**DR K.S. REDDY**  
DIRECTOR, PHFI



"We are planning to introduce public health officers in rural areas for primary and preventive healthcare."

**P.K. PRADHAN**  
UNION HEALTH  
SECRETARY



A CLASS IN  
PROGRESS AT AIIMS

India needs **1.5** million doctors, 2.5 million nurses and 10 million paramedics each year for the next 20 years.

■ by Damayanti Datta

