‘Better health care needs bold steps’

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Procurement of all Essential Drug List (EDL) medicines by the state; a health tax and specific taxes on alcohol, petrol, tobacco and junk food, a three-year bachelor of medicine without the surgery (MB of MBBS) are some of the bold measures mooted to achieve universal healthcare in India.

The suggestions were made as part of an analysis by Dileep Mavalankar, dean of Indian Institute of Public Health, Gandhinagar, on the recommendations made by the High-Level Expert Group for implementation of universal healthcare coverage in India by 2022. The activity is part of the nationwide campaign ‘Health Access Week’ organised by India Health Progress.

Giving a critique of recommendations made by the expert group headed by K Srinath Reddy to address the issue of lack of healthcare accessibility, Mavalankar listed out issues addressed by the group.

On financing for the universal healthcare, Mavalankar said the group concentrated on funding from the central govt while health was a state subject. "Perhaps we could look at tax on alcohol, tobacco and junk food to finance this."

Talking about how to address the problem of lack of manpower in remote areas, he cited the example of Chhattisgarh, where doctors posted in remote tribal areas were paid Rs70,000 per month apart from incentives. He also said that instead of raising a cadre of bachelor or rural health care professionals one could use innovative approaches like having a bachelor of medicine programme similar to MBBS minus the surgery. Mavalankar said this could be done without compromising on the standards.

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