Activists nudge PM for universal healthcare

By editor
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Health activists Binayak Sen, Abhay Bang and Dr Shrinath Reddy have urged the government to implement provisions for universal healthcare across the country. The group will be forwarding a petition to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and the Planning Commission to ensure free medicines for all and abolishing user fees for public hospitals.

The Centre has already taken a step towards universalisation of healthcare with the commission setting up an expert group and a steering committee. Activists also criticised the recommendation of financial autonomy for government hospitals.

“We have identified some issues such as abolition of user fee in hospitals, price control of essential medicines and review of government-sponsored insurance schemes such as Rajiv Gandhi Jeevandayee Arogya Yojana. We have drafted a letter which will be finalised and sent to the PM in a few days’ time,” said Dr Anant Phadke, part of the Maharashtra branch of JSA.

According to the activists, the Steering Committee’s report for the 12th Fifth Year Plan waters down the High Level Expert Group (HLEG) report on Universal Health Coverage.

“Some of the recommendations made in the HLEG have been repudiated. However, the health ministry has expressed substantial agreement with HLEG and disagreement with the Steering Committee report. We are trying to evolve a consensus,” said Dr K. Srinath Reddy, chairman of HLEG and president of Public Health Foundation of India (PFI).