Ministry disagrees with Plan panel

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New Delhi: The Health Ministry on Friday told the Sonia Gandhi-led National Advisory Council (NAC) that while it is willing to contract in charitable health institutions for the purpose of ensuring universal healthcare (UHC), it is not in agreement with Planning Commission’s prescription of managed care with competitive bidding between public and private set-ups.

The ministry was giving its views on the report of the high-level expert group (HLEG) on UHC more than three months after HLEG chairman Dr K S Reddy had made his presentation before the NAC. Differences between the Health Ministry and the Planning Commission on the quantum and modality of involvement of the private sector have been a sticking point on the implementation of HLEG recommendations and matters had come to such a pass that the ministry had repeatedly sought extensions from the NAC to frame its own opinion in the matter.

In Friday’s meeting, the ministry was represented by Health Secretary P K Pradhan and Additional Secretary Anuradha Gupta. They also told the NAC that the scheme to give free medicines in government health set-ups would start in the “next two-three months”.

Planning Commission had been pushing for a model where hospitals get paid per capita on basis of number of people serviced for a given package. It is the consumer’s choice whether they go to a government or private hospital. This, commission officials say, will force government institutions to ensure quality with strict guidelines for empanelment to rule out fly-by-night operations. The commission is not in favour of pumping in more money in public sector that they feel is “plagued by absenteeism and inefficiency”. They had cited examples of countries like Thailand, New Zealand, Germany and US to propagate the capitation fee model.