

Project to set up health clinics in districts shelved

FOZIA AZAM

ISLAMABAD - As a customary longstanding bureaucratic norm, the Health Ministry's plan to establish urban health clinics in seven districts to facilitate communities at the grass roots level and to reduce burden on secondary and tertiary hospitals, has landed in abeyance.

Earlier, it was decided that the programme would be implemented with the help of the District Administration of the seven districts including Quetta, Peshawar, Karachi, Lahore, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

According to a Health Ministry official, "The project aimed at providing decent and respectable health care facilities to the masses of the country by establishing health clinics urban areas of every union council at the seven identified districts". He said major infrastructure was in place and the only thing needed was to consolidate service delivery at the grass-roots level.

The project was brainchild of the Musharraf regime, however it was anticipated that the present government would not drop the idea, as it was time and cost consuming project. The Ministry also asked the then district administration to identify locations for the proposed clinics and submit the proposal to the Ministry of Health so that the programme may be launched as soon as possible.

The concept behind establishing these clinics was to lessen the burden on the major hospitals, which were already over-burdened with treating patients having minor diseases.

Due to expansion in the urban population, health facilities were needed at the community level. These clinics were supposed to provide 22 emergency medicines to the patients, and to also work as referral facilities having a medical doctor, a nurse, and a lady health visitor/worker and to work in second shift depending on local requirements, he added. The federal government had also agreed to bear the ex-

penses of these clinics for three years.

864 HIV/AIDS patients admitted at PIMS

The National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) is providing free treatment to 864 HIV/AIDS patients in Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS). National Programme Manager, NACP, Dr. Hasan Abbas Zaheer said that this service is being provided through an HIV/AIDS Treatment and Care Centre established in PIMS. He said the services being provided in this center included free of cost voluntary HIV counseling and testing, specialized medical consultation, laboratory and radiological diagnostics, anti-AIDS medicines, antibiotics, and psychosocial support.

He said most of the registered HIV/AIDS cases in the Center are intravenous drug users and deported migrants workers from the Middle East and their spouses and children.

Dr Hasan said the number of new cases being registered is on the increase and each month 25-30 new HIV/AIDS cases are now being registered in PIMS.

He said many of the new cases are referred through NACP partner NGOs which work for the welfare of the people living with HIV. He added the advocacy and awareness efforts of the NACP are bearing fruit and have resulted in more individuals, who may have exposed themselves to HIV, getting themselves tested for HIV/AIDS.

He said the new cases are being diagnosed at an earlier stage of infection rather than being diagnosed years later when the symptoms of AIDS start appearing, explained Dr. Hasan talking to this agency.

Early diagnosis is not only beneficial for the individual concerned but also helps check the spread of HIV from the infected person to their spouse and other family members.

He said over the years, the PIMS HIV Center has evolved as a model HIV Treatment Center in the country, providing high quality out-door and in-door treatment, care and support.