

Bridging Gaps in Rehabilitation:

The Vital Role of NGOs in Low and Middle Income Countries.

Recently, I had the privilege of collaborating with 'Thanal,' a national charitable trust based in Calicut, Kerala. With eight years of experience in government roles, particularly within the National Health Mission, I have spearheaded numerous health initiatives at both national and state levels. However, my time with Thanal exposed me to the pressing need for integration between government entities and NGOs, particularly in underserved communities.

In lower and middle-income countries (LMICs), the lack of fully equipped rehabilitation centers for individuals with disabilities poses a significant challenge. Disability often results from functional impairments, leading to an inability to carry out daily activities and a consequent decline in quality of life. Many individuals require ongoing medical care through a multidisciplinary approach, yet rehabilitation frequently remains an afterthought in healthcare provision.

As of 2019, an alarming 2.41 billion people worldwide could benefit from rehabilitation services. In India, the statistics are equally striking, with 49,300 cases of brain and central nervous system cancer, and 7.6 million cases of traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries(source). Unfortunately, in LMICs like India, neuro rehabilitation services are largely confined to tertiary care centers and private hospitals, leaving primary health care facilities without adequate resources. This urban-centric distribution further exacerbates the inaccessibility of quality healthcare for marginalized communities. Achieving universal health coverage necessitates a more uniform distribution of these vital services, alongside improved outcome measurement tools.

Thanal's 'Brain and Spine Medcity' serves as a model for effective neurorehabilitation. This 50-bed facility is equipped with state-of-the-art technology and operates under a 'hub and spoke' model, utilizing peripheral centers to extend its reach. The program employs standardized tools, and the expertise of physicians specialized in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PMR). By integrating social determinants into their multidisciplinary approach, they are making strides in improving patient outcomes.

It is imperative that government bodies collaborate with NGOs to bridge existing gaps in rehabilitation services. Such partnerships have the potential to make a significant impact on community health, ensuring that those in need receive the quality care they deserve. Integrating resources and expertise can transform rehabilitation from a neglected option to a fundamental component of healthcare, ultimately enhancing the quality of life for countless individuals.

Source:

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