

Interface Meeting

Evolving Responsible Private Healthcare Sector through Multi-stakeholder Engagement

Venue: The Floatel, Kolkata

Date: December 3, 2013

The meeting started with welcome address from Prithviraj Nath, Consultant, CUTS Calcutta Resource Centre. He welcomed all the participants, dignitaries and outlined the objective of the meeting. He explained that the meeting aimed to brainstorm on a blueprint for a responsible healthcare sector in the state with participation from some of the most knowledgeable experts and key players in the sector. The idea, he explained was to have a small group of dignitaries to contribute to the blueprint with concrete action points for each stakeholder category. He also mentioned that this interactive meeting was a part of the Business Regulation and Corporate Conduct (BRCC) Project, which is being implemented by CUTS in West Bengal, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh.

Following the welcome address, Prithviraj mentioned that the objective of the project was to explore how optimal business regulation can promote responsible business conduct in pharmaceutical and private healthcare sectors. While dwelling upon the past activities of the BRCC project, he mentioned that the following activities were undertaken over the last two years.

- State Inception Meeting (April 18, 2012)
- Field Research (April – August 2012)
- State Focus Group Dialogue (September 14, 2012)
- State Reports on the status of Pharmaceutical and Private Healthcare Sectors (September, 2012)
- National Policy Forum (October 8, 2012)
- Capacity Building Workshop (February and April, 2013)
- 2 Interface meetings in each of the project states
- Inter-State Regulators Meeting
- 4 dissemination meetings on the study findings in four different states (other than the project states)
- 2 Capacity Building Workshops - one each for Pharmaceutical and private Healthcare sector players

While highlighting the objectives of the present Interface meeting, he said that there are broadly two objectives of this meeting.

- To enable a **Policy Discourse** between business community and policymakers to facilitate a policy environment that promotes business development in a sustainable manner.
- To develop the **Blueprint** of a responsible healthcare industry at the state level through discussions and deliberations

Rudra Sankar, CUTS CCIER, made a presentation on 'Blueprint of a responsible private healthcare sector'. Through this presentation, he shared his experience from the Capacity Building workshop for doctors and representatives of private hospitals organised in the month of February, 2013 in Hyderabad. He said that the purpose of the workshop was to facilitate the process of discussion on responsible ways of doing business. He added that the purpose was to develop understanding on certain technical elements related to private healthcare sector and to discuss the challenges faced by the private healthcare sector in becoming more responsible towards the society in which they operate. A 'writeshop' was conducted as one of the session during the workshop with a view to receive inputs from all the participants regarding their expectations from various stakeholders (State government, Regulators, Firms, Sectoral Associations and Civil Society) related to the private healthcare sector along with existing challenges and the way forward.

Rudra Sankar further shared that the matrix/structure of the proposed blueprint is based on the inputs and suggestions received during this workshop and it reflects the challenges faced by the private healthcare sectors. The same matrix was being used at the present workshop to collate inputs from all different stakeholders. Once the draft blueprint is ready, it would be shared with all key stakeholders, he added.

Prithviraj Nath then requested Prof. Krishnangshu Roy, Director, Institute of Public Health, Department of Health & Family Welfare, Government of West Bengal, to be the moderator for the discussion on the blueprint.

Prof. Krishnangshu Roy mentioned at the beginning that finalising a blueprint is a long process and not a one-day job. Before finalising the blueprint we must go to different stakeholders and listen to them carefully. Mr. Roy said that the researchers must clarify whether it is a questionnaire, operational or a benchmark study. In response, Rudra Sankar mentioned that this study is mainly a questionnaire study. Mr Roy further added that when we speak about business regulation, we must take into account the government departments as well, as they are also the service providers and thus doing business.

The first challenge mentioned under the State Regulator "Existing regulatory framework not optimal enough to tackle the issues related to private healthcare sector" gave rise to a long debate.

Dr. R. D. Dubey, President, Indian Medical Association (IMA), West Bengal Chapter, suggested that there should be regular/periodical interactions between the hospitals and the state government. There should be optimal regulatory measures. These meetings/interactions should include people from different walks of life like CSOs, regulators. Their views should be taken into account while forming regulatory framework. It should not be between the hospital authorities and the government only, Dr. Dubey stated.

Mr. Santanu De, Direct Initiative for Social and Health Action (DISHA), mentioned that the CSOs are not included in any decision making bodies of the private hospital. As the CSOs represent the voice of the common people, they should be included in the committees of the private hospitals.

Mrs. Sunita Grover, Deputy Director, Directorate of Drug Control, West Bengal, suggested that even the respective regulatory people should be there in such committees.

However, responding to the views expressed by the above mentioned participants, Ms. Suparna Sengupta, COO, Woodlands Hospital, informed the house that their hospital includes representatives from the CSOs in the committees which make decisions.

Another challenge that raised considerable debate in the house is “Lack of transparency and information sharing with the patient in performing activities” which comes under Private Hospitals.

Dr. R. D. Dubey mentioned here that proper dialogue, documentation and consent of the patient is extremely important during a treatment. This way the healthcare providers can maintain transparency with the patients, he said.

Gour Kanti Paul, Assistant Director, Directorate of Drug Control, West Bengal, mentioned that there should be proper guidance to the patient when s/he comes to a hospital for treatment. Many a times the patients are misguided and thus gets delay in receiving treatment, he mentioned.

The house thoroughly discussed and provided inputs on the other challenges mentioned in the matrix for the blueprint. This entailed putting down action points against each of the challenges with envisaged short term and long term outcomes.

At the end of the session, Mr. Gaurab Sen, Centre Coordinator, CUTS CRC, thanked everyone for the rich deliberation and discussions. He expressed hope that the inputs received through this meeting will be of great help to formulate the blueprint for the private healthcare sector in West Bengal.