

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE AT THE CONVOCATION CEREMONY OF KING
GEORGE'S MEDICAL UNIVERSITY**

Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh: 12-10-2012

I thank Shri B.L. Joshi, Governor of Uttar Pradesh and Chief Minister, Shri Akhilesh Yadav for a very warm welcome extended to me. I am no stranger to Uttar Pradesh. However this is my first visit to Uttar Pradesh after assumption of my present responsibility.

On this occasion, my thoughts return to the glorious history of this region. I am humbled as I remember, with reverence, the great men and women who have walked this land.

This is the land which inspired authors like Valmiki, Vyasa, Tulsidas, Surdas and Bhrgu who lived and composed their thought here. Yogis, sufi poets and mystics like Amir Khusro, Kabir were revered in these parts. To come back to our own times, giants among our nation's freedom fighters and the leaders of its independence movement hailed from this land. It is a moment to remember that it was here that the first slogans for 'swaraj' rang

out, the first draft Constitution was passed and first steps towards self governance were taken. In Naini nearby, freedom fighters, including Motilal Nehru, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, Govind Ballabh Pant and Rafi Ahmed Kidwai and many others were imprisoned during the Indian independence movement.

This is also the birthplace of Susruta, the 'Father of Surgery', whose seminal contributions have enriched the ancient science of Ayurveda. He lived, taught and practiced on the banks of the Ganges in the area that corresponds to the present day Varanasi.

Distinguished guests and dear students:

I consider it a privilege to be a part of the celebration of the 8th Convocation of this prestigious University. The King George's Medical University, which is now over 100 years old, has earned a name in the field of medical care, teaching and research, not only in India but internationally.

I am always encouraged and rejuvenated when I interact with the youth of our country for it further strengthens my belief that the

future of India is in safe hands. All of you today who are receiving your degrees and awards are some of the best and the brightest of our land. This Convocation marks the end of one phase of your life but, more importantly, the beginning of another wherein you will not only define yourselves in your quest for professional excellence but will also carry along the hopes, aspirations and dreams of resurgent India.

India has made significant progress since Independence. Our achievements in Agriculture, Industry, Trade, Defence, Space and Atomic Energy have been exceptional. We are known the world over for our talented reservoir of scientists, doctors and IT professionals. With our fast growing economy and democratic institutions of State, which have withstood the test of time, we are well on our way to being a leading economic power. There are, however, many challenges that we need to confront and many battles that we need to fight before we can truly claim to have elevated the quality of life of our people.

Provision of universal healthcare is one such challenge and, therefore, one of the top most priorities for Government. The Eleventh Plan had noted that though the total expenditure on health in India, as a percentage of GDP, was around 5%, there was a disproportionately high reliance on private, particularly household's out of pocket expenditure on health. This reflected a critical imbalance in the health care system which stemmed from deficiencies in the public sector's capacity to deliver basic health care. The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) launched in 2005 aimed at strengthening healthcare infrastructure in rural areas. As per data available, Public Health expenditure is likely to have reached 1.4% of GDP by the end of the Eleventh Plan period. We now aim at raising the public health expenditure to 2.5% of GDP by the end of the Twelfth Plan period.

Lack of human resources is as responsible for inadequate provision of health services as lack of physical infrastructure, especially in rural areas. The density of doctors in India is only 0.6 per 1,000 and that of nurses and midwives 1.30 per 1000, representing collectively 1.9 health workers per 1,000 pointing

clearly to the acute shortage of healthcare professionals. In addition, because of a skewed distribution of cadres of health workers, the vulnerable populations in rural, tribal and hilly areas continue to be under-served.

We must, therefore, ensure a sizeable expansion in teaching institutions for doctors, nurses and paramedics. The on-going initiatives for integrating AYUSH and capacity development of the traditional healthcare providers need strengthening. Positive traditional healthcare practices and local remedies need to be encouraged.

The Central Government is also providing financial assistance to State Governments for strengthening and up-gradation of Government medical colleges to enable them to create new Post Graduate seats and start new Post Graduate Departments. Distance learning should be encouraged and popularised—as also extension services in rural areas. Non-Government Organizations and private sector entrepreneurs should also step up their

involvement in an effort to share responsibility and make a contribution.

We also need to devise effective and sustainable solutions to the existing and emerging health problems faced by our vast population. This would need innovations in preventive approaches, treatments and rehabilitation. The frontiers of science and technologies must be extended for improving the health of the people, especially the poor.

People must be at heart of advances in health and delivery of healthcare. The new challenges of the country's health sectors are opportunities for the Institute to further contribute towards nation building. Excellence of this institution should not be confined to Lucknow only but must touch the hearts of the millions all over the State who are still struggling for equitable access to quality health care.

Friends, Gandhiji, who taught by his own example, observed, *“Service that is rendered without joy helps neither the servant nor*

the served. But all other pleasures as possessions pale into nothingness before service which is rendered in a spirit of joy.”

I would like to leave these thoughts with you as I extend my best wishes to the graduating students and awardees in their future endeavours. I would also like to congratulate Prof. Prem Puri and Surendra K. Varma for receiving the D.Sc. Honoris Causa from this prestigious University for the unique contribution in the profession and for serving humanity. I am sure you all will strive to be good human beings, for only then can you be good doctors, and weave a web of life full of joy, peace and purpose.

Thank you,

Jai Hind!