Acknowledging the WASH Amenities

What is the issue?

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) amenities are critical to the safe functioning of health care systems.

What is the global estimates on WASH amenities?

- Whatever the healthcare systems may be the adequate Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) amenities, including waste management and environmental cleaning services, are critical to their safe functioning.
- According to a joint report of World Health Organization and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) outlines, WASH services in many facilities across the world are missing or substandard.
- According to data from 2016, an estimated 896 million people globally had no water service at their healthcare facility.
- More than 1.5 billion had no sanitation service.
- One in every six healthcare facilities was estimated to have no hygiene service (meaning it lacked hand hygiene facilities at points of care, as well as soap and water at toilets), while data on waste management and environmental cleaning was inadequate across the board.

What are the issues with lack of WASH?

- When a healthcare facility lacks adequate WASH services, infection prevention and control are severely compromised.
- This has the potential to make patients and health workers sick from avoidable infections.
- As a result (and in addition), efforts to improve maternal, neonatal and child health are undermined.
- Lack of WASH facilities also results in unnecessary use of antibiotics, thereby spreading antimicrobial resistance.

What measures are needed for the better reach of WASH?

- **Recommendations of WHO -** According to a World Health Assembly

Resolution it is important to ensure at least 60% of all healthcare facilities have basic WASH services by 2022, at least 80% have the same by 2025, and 100% of all facilities provide basic WASH services by 2030.

- For this, member states should implement each of the WHO and UNICE recommended practical steps.
- Health authorities should conduct in-depth assessments and establish national standards and accountability mechanisms.
- Across the region, and the world, a lack of quality baseline data limits authorities' understanding of the problem.
- As this is done, and national road-maps to improve WASH services are developed, health authorities should create clear and measurable benchmarks that can be used to improve and maintain infrastructure and ensure that facilities are 'fit to serve'.
- **Engagement of Healthcare professionals -** Health authorities should increase engagement and work to instill a culture of cleanliness and safety in all healthcare facilities.
- Alongside information campaigns that target facility administrators, all workers in the health system from doctors and nurses to midwives and cleaners should be made aware of, and made to practice, current WASH and infection prevention and control procedures (IPC).
- To help do this, modules on WASH services and IPC should be included in pre-service training and as part of ongoing professional development.
- In addition, authorities should work more closely with communities, especially in rural areas, to promote demand for WASH services.
- **Personalizing Health advice** - Authorities should ensure that collection of data on key WASH indicators becomes routine.
- Doing so will help accelerate progress by promoting continued action and accountability.
- It will also help spur innovation by documenting the links between policies and outcomes.
- In this regard WHO is working with member states as well as key partners to develop a data dashboard that brings together and tracks indicators on health facilities, including WASH services, with a focus on the primary care level.

What lies ahead for India?

- India certainly has a serious problem with health literacy and it is the responsibility of public health professionals to close this gap.
- As a member state, India need to achieve the 'flagship priorities' and work towards the SDG targets.

- Indeed, whatever the healthcare facility, whoever the provider, and wherever it is located, securing safe health services is an objective India must boldly pursue.
- Thus Improving WASH services are deemed essential to enhancing the quality of primary healthcare services, increasing equity and bridging the rural-urban divide.

Source: The Hindu

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