Compassionate health care

Why in the news?

The World Health Organization (WHO) released a report titled "Compassion and Primary Health Care" on February 7, 2025.

What are the importances of Compassionate Healthcare?

- **Compassionate healthcare** - It involves *empathetic communication, emotional support, and patient-centered care*.
- **Significance** - It not only benefits patients but also enhances the work environment for healthcare professionals.
- Compassion in healthcare is essential for *improving patient outcomes, reducing stress*, and enhancing the *overall quality of medical services.*
- **Better patient outcomes** - Compassionate healthcare reduces *stress and anxiety* in patients, leading to faster recovery.
- **Faster recovery** - Research conducted by Stanford University's The Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education (CCARE) has found out that patients treated by compassionate health-care providers recover quickly and the duration of their hospital stays is way less.
- **Reduce patients stress** – As per study by the Johns Hopkins Hospital, when doctors spend an additional 40 seconds with each patient and express solidarity, it significantly reduced anxiety in patients and positively influenced their recovery.
- **Strengthens doctor-patient relationships** - It ensures higher *patient satisfaction*, which is crucial for building positive healthcare experiences.
- **Reduces burnout among medical professionals** - When health-care professionals practice compassion, they experience reduced stress, improved job satisfaction, and build stronger relationships with their patients.
- **Encourages holistic healing -** Compassionate healthcare does not just focus on physical recovery but also on *emotional and psychological* well-being.
- **Addresses public health challenges -** Compassion in medical services can *improve accessibility and inclusivity* for marginalized groups.

What are the differences among sympathy, empathy and compassion in medical healthcare?

Sympathy	Empathy	Compassion
It is a pity-based momentary response	Empathy is when people immerse themselves in others' problems and they get overwhelmed in the process.	Compassion is about mindful problem-solving
Health-care workers who operate with empathy can experience anxiety, exhaustion, and sometimes depression when they internalise the anguish of their patients.	Along with demanding work hours, the stress can lead to **empathy fatigue** and further degrade the quality of care to patients.	Compassionate healthcare professionals will feel the patients' pain as their own but, at the same time, maintain a detachment that will not let them get overwhelmed.

What are the challenges in providing compassionate care in India?

- **Low doctor-patient ratio** – Though the doctor-population ratio in the country stands at 1:834 which is better than the WHO standard of 1:1000, doctor to patient ratio is less.
- **Inadequate resources** - The country currently has 0.79 government hospital beds per 1,000 population — far below the two beds per 1,000 population recommended by the National Health Policy 2017

  The Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS) 2022 recommend one bed per 1,000 population as a baseline.

- **Lack of soft skills training** – Medical education focuses more on technical skills than empathy.
- **Financial barriers** – Many patients struggle to afford quality healthcare.
- **Administrative burden** – Doctors spend more time on paperwork than patient care.

What lied ahead?

- Health care is not just about treating illnesses but also promoting the overall well-being of individuals.
- Compassion facilitates adopting a more sustainable approach to health care that will allow professionals to offer excellent medical treatment, be content and peaceful with the recoveries of their patients, and protect their professional and personal lives.
- We need to create awareness on the imperative need of compassionate health care.
- Compassionate health care shall become the driving principle for industry leaders, hospitals, thought leaders, and health-care think-tanks.
- Health-care providers can be equipped on what compassionate care is all about and how they can incorporate it effortlessly.
- Investment is needed in quality training of doctors, nurses and paramedical staff, and experiential learning.
- Medical colleges and training institutes should incorporate courses on compassionate

communication, ethics, and patient engagement.

References

[The Hindu | Building compassion into the health-care structure]