Significance of Rajasthan's Free Medicine Scheme

Why in news?

Rajasthan government has increased medical benefits under the Chief Minister's Free Medicine Scheme.

What is the Chief Minister's Free Medicine Scheme?

- In the year 2011-12, Rajasthan government had announced a scheme to provide commonly-used essential medicines free of cost to patients visiting government healthcare institutions.
- The scheme consists of two components free medicine and free tests.
- To implement the scheme, Rajasthan Medical Services Corporation Limited (RMSCL) was incorporated in 2011, as a Public Limited Company.
- RMSCL was established as a centralized procurement agency for procuring generic medicines, surgical equipment, sutures and medical equipment for the department of Medical, Health and Family Welfare, Medical Education department, among others.

How the system intends to Work?

- Free medicines scheme and free test scheme was introduced on World Health Day in 2013.
- The first phase of the free test scheme was implemented in hospitals affiliated with state medical colleges, as well as district /sub-divisional and satellite hospitals.
- Later the scheme was extended to the community health centers (CHCs), primary health centers (PHCs) and dispensaries.

How many have benefitted from the scheme so far?

- According to recent reports the number of free medicines under the scheme has increased from 608 to 712 and free tests from 70 to 90.
- Between October 2, 2011, and December 2017, the number of free medicine beneficiaries stood at 52.4 crore.
- Interestingly, Rajasthan's population is estimated to be just above seven crore.
- Some also manage to get a second course of prescribed medicines on the

same day, for example, those staying far from the hospital or the dispensary.
- Moreover, patients residing in the border districts of the adjacent states also frequently visit the state to obtain free medicines and avail free tests.
- For free tests, the number of beneficiaries stood at 9.41 crore, as of December 2017.

What are similar initiatives in India?

- **TN Model -**Tamil Nadu introduced a free medicines model in 1995 consisting of highly effective system of drug procurement, quality checks and supply and distribution centered on government hospitals.
- **National Health Mission -**In 2018 Union cabinet has announced National Health Mission (NHM) which would have a "special focus" with "intensification of initiatives such as National Health Mission Free Drugs and Diagnostics Services
- **National Health Policy -**Even the National Health Policy 2017 specifically emphasizes provisions for free medicines and diagnostics at public hospitals.
- But there is still no national scheme guaranteeing free essential medicines to patients in the country.
- **Jan AushadiKendras -** Union government has setup medical dispensaries under Jan Aushadi Yojana to provide medicines at 50-90 per cent cheaper than branded drugs available in the market.
- This scheme aims to make healthcare affordable and encouraging Ease of Living.
- **Ayushman Bharat Yojana**or National Health Protection Scheme - is a centrally sponsored scheme launched in 2018, under the Ayushman Bharat Mission of MoHFW in India.
- The scheme aims at making interventions in primary, secondary and tertiary care systems, covering both preventive and promotive health, to address healthcare holistically.
- It is an umbrella of two major health initiatives namely, Health and Wellness centers and National Health Protection Scheme (NHPS).

Source: Indian Express

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