

# **PM's speech at the 30th Convocation of PGIMER**

**November 3, 2009**

"It is for me a wonderful feeling to be amidst so many bright young men and women full of energy, promise and creativity. Let me first congratulate all those who have been awarded diplomas and medals today. It goes without saying that you are privileged to have studied at this institute of excellence. The knowledge and skills that you have picked up here will serve you well in your professional advancement in years to come. I may believe an exciting time awaits you, full of both opportunities and challenges. I am sure that the education that you have received at this great institution will enable you to excel in your professional careers.

But let me also say that our society expects from our professional men and women to go much beyond the pursuit of their professional careers. As you journey in life and progress in your professional careers, our people expect you to live up to the motto of this institute "Aart Seva Sarva Bhadr a Shodhashch" which means "service to the poorest and research for the good of all". You must always keep the well being of the common man in mind and contribute to it i.e. the talisman Mahatma Gandhi wanted to give to each poor person in our free country. You must find ways of returning to the society and your country a part of what they have given to you. Our country expects that you will never lose sight of the importance of a profession career with emphasis on ethical living. All this is not easy to remember and follow in the rough and tumble of everyday life, but you are all talented young men and women, capable, I am sure, of achieving far more than the ordinary. I sincerely believe that this ambition should guide your career.

It is the vision and zeal of two great leaders, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru and Sardar Partap Singh Kairon, which led to the establishment of the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research. The institute had the good fortune of being steered in its early years by three remarkable human beings and the best minds in the fields of medicine and surgery – Dr. Tulsi Das, Dr. Santokh Singh Anand and

Dr. P.N. Chutani. I had the privilege of knowing each of them personally and they were a source of immense inspiration to their students and society at large. It is today considered a premier institute in higher medical education and training. Over the last few years, I have seen the institute grow stronger and better, adding to its facilities and capabilities each year. We cannot be satisfied with the status quo and must look for greener pastures. There is now an Eye Centre and an Advanced Cardiac Centre which provide quality care to the poor. The PET Scan Centre and the Gamma Knife Centre make available cutting edge technology to the patients. A Bone Marrow Transplant Centre along with a chemotherapy ward has been established. I am told that the tele-medicine link I inaugurated in 2005, the last time I came here, now conducts tele-education sessions with Bhutan and Afghanistan, and also provides the facility of consultation to patients in different parts of Punjab. Also, I have been told, that you will soon start providing technology enabled education to medical schools throughout India. All these developments augur well for the future growth of your institute. Here, I would like to compliment Dr. Talwar for his efforts and fine quality of leadership in the last five years. But I would also urge you not to be complacent. It would require your sustained best efforts to maintain the high standards and leadership status of your institute. We are living in an age where human knowledge is growing at an unprecedented pace and if our institutions have to keep up the pace we have to be on the frontiers of higher education specifically medical science.

India has made substantial progress in health determinants over the past decades. The critical indicators of health have shown consistent improvement over the years. But it is also a fact that in the public sector today we are spending one percent of GDP on health care. It has been our goal to raise it to 2 to 3 per cent. Both, the Central and the State Governments, have to work hard to achieve this goal. Our progress has been much less than what we would have liked to achieve and are capable of achieving. It also does not compare well with what a number of other countries, particularly in South East Asia, have achieved.

To accelerate the improvement in the health status of our population, the Central government has accorded a very high priority to the health sector in the last five years. The funds allocated to this sector have seen a quantum jump in the Eleventh Five Year Plan, increasing by

three times over the previous Plan. We have launched the National Rural Health Mission which seeks to strengthen and improve the public health system in the rural areas of our country. The Mission emphasizes decentralized planning and implementation accompanied by community based monitoring.

A review of the National Rural Health Mission points out to the acute shortage of human resources at various levels in the health sector – specialists, doctors, nurses and paramedics. This is one of the biggest impediments to strengthening of the public health delivery system and scaling up access to health care. To address this deficiency, the government has taken a number of initiatives. My colleague, Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad has already made a mention of this. More medical colleges and nursing schools are being established, particularly in the less developed states. The student teacher ratio has been enhanced in specialties and super specialties from the current level of 1:1 to 2:1. This is expected to increase the number of post-graduate specialists by almost 5000 from the existing level of 13000 within a short period of time. A new scheme for strengthening and upgrading medical colleges of the State Governments is also being launched so as to increase the number of post-graduate medical seats all over the country.

As in economics, so as in medicine too, it is easy to get lost in high level research and forget the ground realities. A common perception among the public is that institutions running with public money end up as ivory towers. It is widely felt that the poor and under-privileged sections of our population do not have adequate access to the health care system. The system needs structural reforms to improve the quality of delivery of services at the grass-root level. It has to be more sensitive to the needs of our women and children. We must also recognize that a hospital centered curative approach to health care has proved to be excessively costly even in the advanced rich developed countries. The debate on health sector reforms is going on in US is indicative of what I have mentioned just now. A more balanced approach would be to lay due emphasis on preventive health care.

The mission of PGI will remain incomplete unless the interest of the common man is addressed effectively and purposefully. Institutions like yours must link more effectively with the community and address its needs. Medical and para-medical personnel should imbibe a sense of commitment to welfare and well being of the common man.

Through your research you must attempt to discover the most cost effective strategies of prevention and treatment of diseases. Only when the lives of the common people, be they in Tripura or the tribal areas of Chattisgarh, are touched by your research and the most under privileged child in your ward goes back home satisfied with your care, will your mission be truly accomplished. I would once again like to emphasize that yours is not an ordinary commercial profession, but one that calls for ethical living.

I wish this institute, and its faculty, its staff and students all the very best in years to come. I am sure all of you will continue to strive relentlessly to achieve the institute's mission and contribute substantially to the fulfillment of the health care needs of our people. Let me end by once again congratulating those who have been awarded diplomas, degrees and medals today. May your path be blessed."