

Convocation Address by the Chief Guest H.E. Shri Muralidhar Chandrakant Bhandare, Governor of Odisha, at the Annual Convocation on 15th October 2011, at Bhubaneswar (Odisha) during 51st Annual Conference

I am happy to be at the Annual Convocation, a major feature of the Annual Conference of National Academy of Medical Sciences being held at Bhubaneswar. I understand this is the 51st Annual Conference. This conference is indeed memorable, being the Golden Jubilee Year of the Academy. I take this opportunity to extend our cordial welcome and good wishes to all the members attending the conference.

It is heartening to note that the National Academy of Medical Sciences has been promoting the knowledge of Medical Sciences and its practical application and effecting coordination between medical and other scientific departments to meet medical and social goals and solve problems as well. It is encouraging and sponsoring symposia and workshops regularly on a number of important topics. I am told that it has also made significant efforts to improve the outreach of Continuing Medical Education (CME) Programmes by establishing tele-linkages between medical colleges. I am given to understand that it is working on to expand its tele-education activities to cover more medical colleges. Besides all these, it is even providing vital inputs to the Government in matters of National Health Policy and Planning. These are all indeed praiseworthy and speak of the commitment of the Academy. I am sure the vision of and the guidance it has received from many eminent persons including several Presidents of India as its Patron-in-Chief ever since its establishment in 1961 will surely help it to scale new heights in improving the health sector and the delivery mechanism.

I find the highlight of this year's Annual Conference is the Scientific Symposium on "Social Determinants of Health". Any discussion on social determinants of health is always welcome and relevant as well to improve the access of common people to the general health care services. After all, a healthy human resource is an asset to the nation.

Health is not merely means to the absence of disease but it is a state of physical, mental and social well being. Social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and their age including the health system. The social determinants of health were earlier discussed only among academics. This is now changing. While medical care can prolong survival and improve diagnosis after some serious diseases, more important for the health of the population as a whole are the social and economic conditions that make people ill and in need of medical care in the first place. Nevertheless, universal access to medical care is clearly one of the social determinants of health.

As one example, let us consider the social determinant of health of early life. Early life is shaped by availability of sufficient material resources that assure adequate educational opportunities and food among others. The availability of quality and regulated childcare is an especially important policy option in support of early life. These are not issues that usually come under individual control. A policy-oriented approach will only place such findings within a broader policy context. I am sure the scientific symposium will be of immense benefit to address social determinants of health to reduce health inequalities.

Orissa is a state where challenges to health sector are many. The state has high infant mortality and maternal mortality rate. Lack of awareness because of low literacy makes people particularly in tribal areas vulnerable. Government is making all steps to improve health sector. However, concerted effort from all including National Academy of Medical Sciences supplementing Government effort is sought to make healthcare facilities accessible to all. The Symposium held on this occasion on "Emerging and Re-emerging infections with special reference to Eastern India" is very relevant to the state and I am sure it will have impact on health scenario and health policies of the Government.

Health is a prime necessity. So every effort should be made to promote health of our people. Significant developments have been made in our country in recent years and improvements have been achieved through application of modern methods. Specialization and super-specialization have come up in different fields of medical profession which made it possible to treat and cure many ailments. But we are still fighting diseases like malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. In addition to that increase in population has thrown serious challenge to ensure health care services for all. However, the more concerning aspect is that medical services and treatment have become expensive and even out of reach of common man. Majority of our people are not in a position to bear the expenses of modern and sophisticated treatment. It is indeed a challenging task before our health professionals and specialists to make treatment facilities available at affordable cost. They are required to evolve quality treatment in a cost effective way by developing their research work and utilizing latest knowledge and technology.

I understand medical professionals of this Academy have assembled in this conference to take stock of their effort to cure the ailing humanity. I understand Academy like this which emphasizes on quality will certainly help to spread the advantages of medical science in the country and develop programmes to address the root causes of ill health and health inequalities.

Medical profession is a noble profession where one gets opportunity to serve and alleviate the sufferings of man. One must always feel proud to be in this profession and always work to uphold the noble objective and its dignity. I am given to understand that annual convocation is an occasion when eminent medical and biomedical scientists elected as Fellows and Members of the Academy receive their scrolls. Some also receive medals for their excellent work. I am happy to present awards to the recipients today. I congratulate all of them and I am sure they will look upon this recognition and token of appreciation to strive further hard to enrich their professional knowledge and uphold the great tradition of the profession and the Academy. Our early Ayurveda teacher Charaka said "There is no limit to science and knowledge on medicine". One cannot set any kind of limits to the advance of knowledge. Research is another area which needs to be given utmost importance as it will lead to explore new frontiers of knowledge and arrive at new conclusions.

With these words, I have great pleasure to be on this annual convocation of the National Academy of Medical Sciences and wish the Fellows and Members will direct all their energy, knowledge and effort and set high standards. I wish them and the Academy all success.

Jai Hind.