

Convocation Address by Prof. P.N. Srivastava, Vice Chancellor, Jawaharlal Nehru University on the 22nd Annual Convocation of NAMS on April 6, 1985

The first paragraph of the Health and Family Planning document of the Seventh Plan states “India is committed to attain the goal of health for all by 2000 AD for developing the country’s vast human resources and for accelerating and speeding up total socio-economic development and attaining an improved quality of life. For this, primary health care has been accepted as the main instrument of action. In the seventh plan, this should continue, and, in addition emphasis should be laid on the preventive and promotive aspects, and in organizing effective and efficient health services which are comprehensive in nature, easily and widely available and accessible to and affordable by the people.”

Health of the people is the basic foundation upon which the development of any nation depends. Health will have to be looked upon as a positive concept and should go far beyond the mere absence of illness. Since the seventies, a series of health policies and doctrines have changed the whole concept to public health promotion, disease prevention and related education of the public should not only be considered desirable but should become the central theme of health programmes which will automatically bring about improvements in mortality and morbidity rates. Primary health care which is being accepted the world over should be seen as a key to achieving many of the changes sought. The organization and structure of health services will have to be suitably modified accordingly with tiers of services reaching from community level services, through intermediate levels to major referral and back-up services to suit the requirements of the country.

The policy of the health for all by the year 2000 AD has been adopted by the World Health Organization. The Government of India is not only a party to it and has accepted it but as already stated in the beginning, stands committed to the attainment by all the citizen of the country of a level of health that will permit them to lead a socially and economically productive life. This is no doubt a very tall order and a difficult task. To achieve this target the individual and the community will have to be mobilized and to help them understand the essential nature of health and how to maintain it themselves and to encourage them to articulate their needs effectively. In this very Institute, a couple of months or so back, I had advocated the use of mass media like radio and television for the purpose. If we can have a programme on Krishi Darshan, why not on Health for All by the year 2000 AD.

The basic bottlenecks to achieve the targets are safe drinking water and proper sanitation. At the commencement of the Sixth Plan, there were about 2.3 lakhs villages in the country with a population of more than 18 crores which lacked safe drinking water. The Sixth Plan provided a total outlay of 2000 crores both under central and state sector for this programme. The allocation has not been very big and I am not aware of the targets that have been achieved. A number of international agencies have been supporting the challenging task. UNICEF is assisting the rural water supply programmes by providing drilling rigs and accessories which are primarily useful in providing drinking water sources in the hard rock regions of the country. They have already supplied 200 rigs which have been distributed in various states. Similarly the International Development Association of the World Bank is assisting the Gujarat Water Supply and Sewerage project at a cost of about Rs. 150 crores. The governments of Netherlands, Denmark and European Economic Community are cooperating with us in this area in many States.

When modern science and technology have made such powerful contribution to human welfare, why it is that most of the world population still cannot take for its ability to meet the basic need for food, water, shelter and necessities essential for survival. The answer is simply and well acknowledged lack of resources. While our country could allocate only Rs. 2,000 crores for safe drinking water in one Plan, President Reagan is spending Rs. 40,000 crores initially for research alone for developing “Star Wars”. Whether we like it or not, the *Homo sapiens* is a single, inter-dependent, world-wide species and we are all intimately bound up with each other around the earth. East and

West, North and South, our fate is linked together and the earlier we realize it, the better it will be for all of us.

I will like to touch upon briefly another area which, in my opinion, is also of great importance and needs attention. Ours is a nation of more than 700 million people of which about 260 million are children below the age of 15. The 1984 data from the National Institute of Nutrition shows that the general nutritional status of children in India is extremely depressing with between 50% to over 70% of all children across different states suffering from inadequate calories intake and around 20% of the children suffering from acute protein deficiency as well. Impoverished people in general and children in particular are at high risk of suffering from a wide variety of diseases which have been drastically curtailed in technically advanced countries. The decline in infectious diseases perhaps represents the greatest health progress made in human history and for this, apart from other things, basic necessities have been clean water and efficient sanitation.

It is very well known that there is a powerful link between socio-economic conditions and disease. However, we need not have to wait for complete removal of our poverty to achieve the desired goals since many examples of useful and inexpensive interventions are available to diminish the scourge of infectious diseases which can be applied now, simultaneously with broader efforts to improve the socio-economic conditions.

There is a direct relationship between education and health and an inverse relationship between literacy and infant mortality. There is no need to go into the statistical data to prove this point which is well established. It is rather sad that in the eyes of the Government and the Planning Commission, both education and health receive a very low priority which is so evident and transparent. The Director-General of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research has the status of Secretary to the Government and so is the case with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research but not in the case of Indian Council of Medical Research. The status of the Secretary may not have much meaning but the budget allotted to these Councils do.

It has already been established and is beyond dispute that investment in people and knowledge secures national development and human well-being. The acquired ability of people built up by investments that foster education, informed experience, cumulative skills, and health are fundamental to social progress. Human resources are the most vital resources of this country. These resources must now be placed in a new context, taking into account the transformation of modern society as a result of the pervasive influence of science and technology and also the deep interdependence of the contemporary world. I am not pessimistic. We are slow but our achievements have been steady and as the maxim goes "Slow and steady wins the race". Although the question of winning any race is not there, we shall positively achieve our goal and grow from strength to strength.