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Pvt hospitals to stop treating patients with govt insurance cover

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TIMES VIEW

Mangaluru/Bengaluru:

Health insurance schemes in Karnataka have come to a standstill with leading private hospitals refusing to entertain patients who come for specialized treatment with government insurance cover.

Much-hyped health insurance schemes like Vajpayee Arogya Shree (VAS), Rajiv Arogya Bhagya (RAB) and Jyothi Sanjeevini schemes are aimed at providing cashless healthcare facilities to the poor.

"Already, private hospitals are facing losses with the government health insurance scheme as the package offered under it is inadequate. Moreover, the government doesn't clear dues on time. Now it is again pressuring private hospitals to agree to these insurance schemes, which will run up losses for them and lead to deterioration of their health infrastructure," alleged a hospital owner in Bengaluru.

Super-specialty hospitals in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts have decided to stop entertaining patients who come for treatment with government health insurance schemes from Monday.

Nursing Homes and Hospital Managements Association president Yusuf A Kumble said the Suvarna Arogya Suraksha Trust that administers schemes on behalf of the government, owes over Rs 200 crore to many super-specialty hospitals across the state. "Reimbursements were made irregularly, and no payment has been made in the past nine months," he alleged.

Health minister K R Ramesh Kumar admitted there was a delay in clearing bills due to private hospitals and

Bad news for the poor who are dependent on government insurance schemes for their healthcare. With the government failing to pay up dues and private hospitals throwing up their hands, it is the needy who are caught in the crosshairs. In such a situation, the government should make haste to clear all bills, and also work out reasonable rates for medical services. There are also allegations that BPL cards can be acquired by anyone, and used to avail of such services. Instead, the government invest more in healthcare to end such ad hoc arrangements.

claimed the dues were not more than Rs 135 crore. "Last week, we cleared Rs 35 crore. We will pay another Rs 100 crore in the next 10-15 days."

According to Kumble, the association members decided to stop offering specialized treatment under these schemes following the government's inability to clear dues amounting to Rs 60 crore to about 11 super specialty hospitals in Dakshina K, Udupi and Manipal, and also as treatment rates were draining them.

"The treatment rates were fixed seven years ago. We accepted the government's proposal as we presumed we would get a few patients and it would be a public service. These days, almost every patient coming for super-specialty treatment brings a BPL card. The rates fixed by the government seven years ago now account for less than 20% to 25% of the actual cost of treatment," said Kumble.

Law protecting doctors only on paper, say medicos



THE PAINED LOT: Members of the Resident Doctors Association at Bangalore Medical College and Research Institute organized a march on Sunday to protest growing violence towards doctors in the state

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Bengaluru: Three assaults on doctors in a week, allegedly by relatives of patients, have only proved that the Karnataka Prohibition of Violence against Medicare Service Personnel and Damage to Property in Medicare Service Institutions Act, 2009 lacks teeth, say doctors in Bengaluru.

The attacks were reported from Hassan Institute of Medical Science; TSS Hospital in Sirsi and JJM Medical College in Davanagere. Terming the acts barbaric and shameful, the doctors have not only demanded that the government take strict action against the offenders, but also pointed to the possibility of medical fraternity resorting to defensive medicine and showing reluctance in taking risks to treat patients.

"The recent years have seen a rise in attacks on doctors and medical establishments. While the issue has several facets to it, the impact it may have is worrying. Doctors will start practising defensive medicine

We seek security at workplace: Doctors

Doctors working in government hospitals attend to a whopping number of patients, sometimes beyond their physical and mental limits. However, they often get assaulted by patients' attenders and hardly see justice, claimed the Resident Doctors Association (RDA) at Bangalore Medical College and Research Institute.

"Often, there's not enough security at the casualty ward and no limit to the number of attenders. At times, there's complete lack of security during odd hours of the night. Doctors sacrifice their sleep, food and personal life for patients. It's not much to ask for security during duty hours and a safe workplace," said Dr Abhishek Saxena, a resident doctor at Victoria Hospital.

order to police across the state to strictly implement the law, it has hardly made a difference in reality, claim doctors.

practising defensive medicine and focus on safeguarding themselves from patients' families, instead of taking risks and recommending the best treatment required," said Dr Vishal Rao US, a noted oncologist and member of State High Powered Committee of Tobacco Control.

"Every time such an incident occurs, it hurts the very soul of art and science of medicine, demotivating the entire fraternity. Healing a patient's wound is a doctor's foremost duty, but it's equally vital for him to maintain his dignity and stand for his rights when he performs the act of service," Dr Rao added.

The existing law to protect doctors and medical institutions was introduced in Karnataka in 2009. Section 3 of the law makes any attack on doctors or hospital property a cognizable and non-bailable offence. Although the director general of police had, on request from the Indian Medical Association (IMA), issued an

"Although the law protecting medical fraternity and institutions has been passed in Parliament as well as in the state, the problem is with inappropriate enforcement. Following repeated violence against doctors, many hospitals, including us, will put up notices on our premises and the same will be signed by the police commissioner and superintendent of police. The notice, which can be both in English and Kannada, will inform patients' relatives that taking law in their own hands is punishable," said Dr Sudarshan Ballal, chairman, Manipal Hospitals.

"There must be a rigorous campaign by the people, media and government for stricter implementation of the law. Offenders deserve exemplary punishment. They must understand that vandalizing hospitals or beating up doctors isn't a solution to the problem. There are forums like consumer courts where they can place their grievances," he added.