

The Daily Star has recently launched the Star Health page mainly to focus on our healthcare system and to help make it serve our people better. We intend to take some other initiatives like organising roundtables and seminars with professional medical bodies with the same purpose.

Our initiative are aimed at helping the government, the healthcare professionals, the doctors, the NGOs working in the sector and the development partners to set up a better public healthcare delivery mechanism and bring a new dynamism to this vital sector.

We think the media can play a very effective supporting role in improving our healthcare system. We promise our readers that The Daily Star, as a socially committed newspaper, will do everything in its power to bring about a more pro-people healthcare system.

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Star health

DHAKA SUNDAY APRIL 20, 2003

e-mail: starhealth@thedailystar.net

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Bangladesh Medical Conference 2003

Professional development for better healthcare



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia addressing the inaugural ceremony of Bangladesh Medical Conference of BMA

Restore people's confidence and work towards quality healthcare.



Participants at the conference in China-Bangladesh Friendship Conference Hall in Agargaon, Dhaka

STAR HEALTH DESK

Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA), the apex body of more than 32,000 medical practitioners of the country held its first ever Bangladesh Medical Conference last Thursday. The event was organised for professional development of medical professionals of the country. This year the slogan of the organisation was 'Professional development for better healthcare'.

More than 8,000 doctors from across the country attended the mammoth gathering at the China-Bangladesh Friendship Conference Hall in Agargaon, Dhaka. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia attended the function as chief guest while Health and Family Welfare Minister Dr Khandaker Moshraf Hossain, State Minister for Health and Family Welfare Amanullah Aman were special guests. Senior ministers and members of parliament, diplomats, UN high officials and representatives of development partners and high officials of the government also attended the occasion.

In her speech the Prime Minister urged the doctors to design strategies that would help in reducing exodus of patients seeking treatment abroad. She said, "Restore people's confidence and work towards quality healthcare."

BMA for the first time introduced BMA Gold Medal for outstanding contributions for the development of the health sector. Every year three doctors would be awarded. On Thursday three noted doctors received the award.

They were late Dr Shah Alam, Bir Uttam for his glorious contributions in the Independence War of the country in 1971, late Dr Shamsul Alam Milon for outstanding contributions for fight against the autocratic rule and re-establishing democracy in the country in 1990 and Professor M A Majed for organisational activities among the doctor community.

The new body of the BMA central committee leaders comprising 42 members placed a set of demands including developing a modern library at its central office for continuous medical education, building a dormitory for doctors and an auditorium. Besides, BMA also demanded unification of two wings of the ministry - health and family planning directorates for better comprehensive reproductive health, decrease infant and maternal mortality rates. This is a modern concept to reduce IMR and MMR, which was accepted at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).

In the afternoon five scientific sessions were held also, organised by BMA in cooperation with Unicef, WHO and the government. The scientific sessions were on 'HIV/AIDS - Bangladesh perspective', 'Comprehensive reproductive healthcare in Bangladesh', 'Integrated management of childhood illness in Bangladesh', 'Arsenic contamination - a health hazard of Bangladesh' and on 'Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) - A potential health danger'. A cultural programme and a raffle draw, sponsored by Lab Aid Ltd, were held in the evening.

Young doctors speak out

Some young doctors who spoke to the Star health correspondent and expressed concern on a few issues they feel BMA should take up for dialogue with the government or initiative programme in partnership with professional bodies for development of future of health sector in Bangladesh.

Most of the young doctors Star health correspondent spoke to were from outside the capital like Sylhet, Rangpur, Magura, Khulna, Feni, Comilla, Rajshahi and Mymensingh.

They said that improvement of standard of medical education should be a priority and introducing modern technology in developing

medical science like telemedicine should also be a focus of BMA.

"We consider our doctors are some of the best in the world but in terms of technology we lag behind. The government, as we have observed, is reluctant to improve medical education but considering BMA's capability I believe they should take initiative to give more attention on the issue," said a young doctor from Rangpur.

"We don't want to see BMA negotiating with the government for transferring doctors and making postings to doctors of its choice. Neither do we want to see BMA acting as a political party. We want professional development of all medical practitioners and leaders should

work towards this end," said a 26 years old doctor from Khulna.

"The BMA leaders have a lot of role to play but as priority I believe it can start with training for selected doctors. We don't have many specialists in the country. We have too many general surgeons but not many neurologist or nephrologist. I think BMA should act as a parallel body to ministry of health and suggest certain thrusts where government has not put enough attention," said a young doctor from Mymensingh.

Another young doctor expects that BMA should raise its voice to negotiate with the government in raising the current remuneration

from Taka 5000 to Tk 6000 for the intern doctors. She said, "We work very hard but the amount we get is not at all sufficient even to cover travel expenses. BMA leaders should realise this and fight on behalf of us." She however, thinks that there is good environment in the country for quality medical education. "What we learn today is up to the international standard but there is no end to improving the curriculum. I am also happy that when we go abroad for higher degree we find ourselves well acquainted with the modern teaching."

"A modern BMA soon"



Professor M A Hadi, President, BMA greeting a participant



Dr A Z M Zahid Hossain, Secretary General, BMA

Dr A Z M Zahid Hossain, Secretary General of Bangladesh Medical Association said its leaders vowed to develop BMA into a modern association where all professionals involved in the medical profession would get benefit from this.

purpose and raise social values of our doctors. I believe as a collective body we have enough work to do but we want to begin with professional training for the doctors, especially for our young doctors. Gradually, BMA would serve its members even better and we want to take the challenges of the millenium bringing new technology and work towards whatever necessary for our people so they don't have to seek treatment abroad."

"We had pledged that we would play more active role if elected. We would not allow any corruption or mismanagement. BMA would serve professional



One of the scientific sessions in progress at the conference



Dr Farzana who is still in her internship at the Faridpur Medical College said, "There are many young doctors who remain unemployed after graduation. This brings frustration to many talented doctors. I expect Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) should take an initiative for employment of the young doctors."



Rumana, voiced similar demands saying, "After graduation most of the doctors, as we have noticed, do not find job for months or often years. There is no job guarantee in the public sector. In the private sector salaries offered are not enough often they don't want to honour us. It is often taken as granted that doctors get job instantly but how many of you really know that many young doctors are sitting idle?"