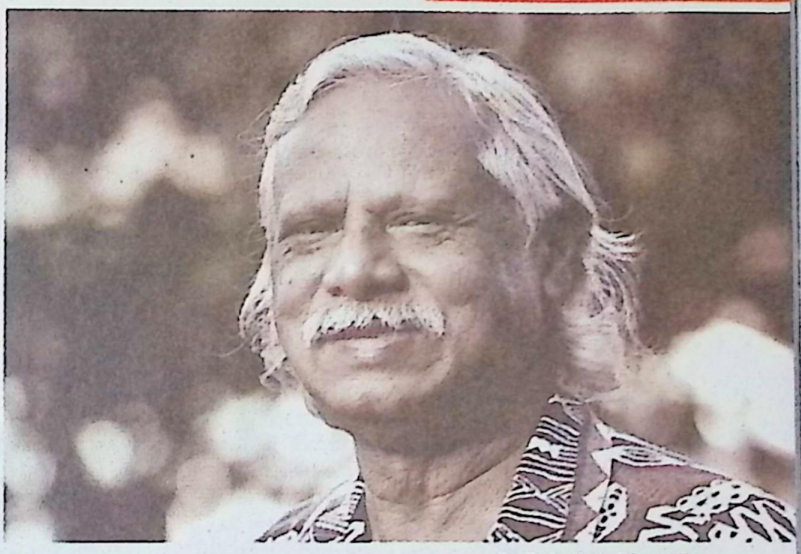
wives can do the job unless there are complications. But that's not something privatised, commercially run healthcare providers are interested in. We need a more prudent health policy for a poor country like ours. Ageing is a real issue. The number of elderly people is growing fast in Bangladesh. They have specific health problems. They don't only need medical care; they need a warm hand and a friendly smile. Often physiotherapists are of help, and it is important to teach them those skills. Cancer treatment is exorbitant and out of the reach of ordinary people. It need not be so.

At hospitals and clinics, doctors and staff must be available round the clock. Absenteeism is 74 percent in Bangladesh compared to 43 percent in India and 66 percent in Pakistan. The price of medicine must be regulated. The national Drug Policy of 1982 made sure that good quality drugs were available at low prices. In 1994 the government through a notification by the Ministry of Health lifted price control from all but 117 medicines. Successive governments since then have showed no interest in changing that. All the 370 essential medicines on the WHO list should be price controlled. Non-essential drugs should be taxed. Doctors must be trained to respect patients. They must be trained to work in rural areas. The government can offer incentives like opportunities for higher studies to doctors who serve 3 years in rural areas. Medical students may spend at least a month a year in rural hospitals. Community clinics and Union Health and Family Welfare Centres must be upgraded. These workplaces are ideal for interns to learn. We have 250 formulation companies but the number of raw material producing companies is less than 10. We import most raw materials. The government must give incentives to those who want to set up raw material producing companies. Private clinics should not provide treatment that is unnecessary. Rates for tests and procedures need to be displayed at the reception so patients can compare. The public must be aware. The media has an important role. They ought to cover these topics on a regular basis.

[This article in no way intends to disrespect the innumerable number of health care professionals who perform their jobs with the highest form of professional integrity.]



Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury

> "Many routine functions of doctors can be delegated to trained nurses and other health workers. For example, there is no reason to start sending all pregnant women to hospitals once labor starts. Trained midwives can do the job unless there are complications."

and general health. Under the mHealth project, Friendship is developing the Friendship Community Medic-Aides (FCMs) who, empowered with mobile phones containing data collection software, will be able to provide medical services at point-of-care. Some have accused her of "spoiling the market" by giving everything for free, to which Runa says, "If neither the government nor any NGO is going to help them, we will."So how to provide affordable healthcare to the poor of the country? "The question you need to ask is how to deliver efficient healthcare services to those who so desperately need it. Healthcare is their universal right and it is pointless to argue if they can afford it or not."

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