

PRIMARY CARE, FAMILY MEDICINE AND FAMILY DOCTOR

# A missing link in health care system

Primary medical care is recognised as a key component and foundation of health care delivery systems worldwide. It is also the most appropriate means to achieve equitable and sustainable improvements in health for the populations in developing countries. Though very similar, Primary Care and Primary Health Care often use interchangeably but have a different concepts.

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Primary Care or Primary Medical care describes a narrow concept that focuses on the person as a whole to improve the health of the individual by providing easy access to medical care. Thus, primary care is defined as “the provision of integrated, accessible health care services by clinicians who are accountable for addressing a large majority of personal health care needs, developing a sustained partnership with patients, and practising in the context of family and community.” Primary Care is the first door of care and connecting link between all the higher levels of healthcare delivery systems. Primary Health Care, in contrast, is a broader concept that includes both individual-level care and population-focused activities that also incorporates public health elements such as universal access to health care, an emphasis on health equity, and collaboration within and beyond the medical sector. Many countries emphasise primary care and have developed strong primary care infrastructures. Examples include Britain’s National Health Service (NHS), which established Primary Care Trusts (PCT) that integrate primary and hospital-based care. Canada has a more balanced primary care-specialist physician ratio. Like Brazil, Sri Lanka and Thailand, developing countries have also implemented national-level strategies to increase access to primary care services. An increasingly popular model for orienting the healthcare system to primary care is the gatekeeper model, which requires patients to select a primary care physician (PCP), known as a Family Doctor and then obtain referrals to specialists.



Logically, primary care speciality and Family Medicine are seen as crucial medical speciality and healthcare necessity because it is assumed to positively impact health outcomes in many countries of the world. Experiences in the international context suggest that primary care-oriented healthcare delivery systems can produce better health outcomes and counteract, to some extent, the negative impact of poor economic conditions on health. Increasing primary care availability in low- and middle-income countries also correlate with improved health like Bangladesh. Many countries in the world have embraced strong primary care, using a variety of structures and models. Lessons from these countries could serve as case studies for our country’s healthcare system, which currently faces an imbalance between

speciality and primary care and a significant shortage and inequitable distribution in the primary care workforce. Many research suggests the need to increase the supply of primary care physicians in our country to strengthen primary medical care. Bangladesh College of Physicians and Surgeons (BCPS) has started its membership, and fellowship examinations on Family Medicine to increase the BMDC recognised family doctors. In addition, many private organisations also started weekend diploma and certificate courses in general medicine to increase the number of competent primary care physicians. The services that fall under primary care will vary depending on the needs of different communities. The writer is a Consultant in Family Medicine, PRAAVA Health. E-mail: drkabar.praava@gmail.com

## Almost one billion children and adults with disabilities and older persons in need of assistive technology denied access

According to a new World Health Organisation (WHO) and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) report, more than 2.5 billion people need wheelchairs, hearing aids, or apps that support communication and cognition. Access to these life-changing products is as low as 3% in low- and middle-income countries. Assistive technology provides the door to education for children with disabilities, work and social engagement for individuals with disabilities, and independent, dignified life for seniors. Denying individuals these life-changing technologies is a human rights violation and economic short-sightedness. According to UNICEF, 240 million children are disabled. Denying children the resources they need to grow affects individual children, families, and communities. If their needs were addressed, they might contribute more. The report notes that the number of people in need of one or more assistive products is likely to rise to 3.5 billion by 2050, due to populations ageing and the prevalence of noncommunicable diseases rising across the world. The report also highlights the vast gap in access between low- and high-income countries. An analysis of 35 countries reveals that access varies from 3% in poorer nations to 90% in wealthy countries. A survey of 70 countries featured in the report found large gaps in service provision and a trained workforce for assistive technology, especially in cognition, communication, and self-care.

## RSV responsible for more than 100,000 deaths worldwide in children under five in 2019

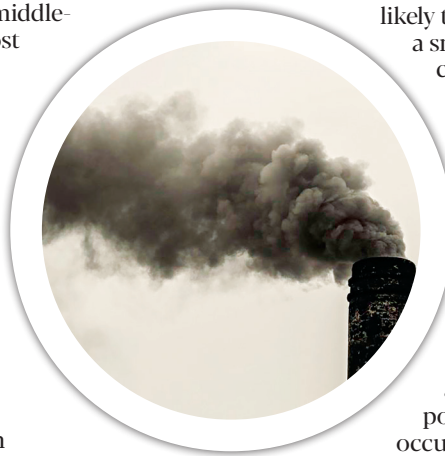


A new study published in The Lancet estimates that Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)-attributable acute lower respiratory infection was responsible for more than 100,000 deaths in children under five globally in 2019. RSV is the predominant cause of acute lower respiratory infection in young children, and the updated estimates reveal that children six months and younger are particularly vulnerable. Across the globe in 2019, there were 33 million RSV-associated acute lower respiratory infection episodes in children under five years old, leading to 3.6 million hospital admissions, 26,300 in-hospital deaths, and 101,400 RSV-attributable deaths overall. This accounts for one in 50 or 2% of annual deaths from any cause in this age range. In 2019, 6.6 million under-6-month-olds had RSV-associated acute lower respiratory infections. RSV caused 1.4 million hospital admissions, 13,300 hospital deaths, and 45,700 overall deaths in this age range, or 2.1% of annual deaths. In low- and middle-income countries, 97% of RSV deaths in children under 5 occurred. Early identification of cases in the community and referral for hospital admission of sick children (particularly those with low oxygen saturation in peripheral blood) and universal effective and affordable immunisation programmes will be vital in the future.

## Pollution responsible for nine million deaths in 2019

STAR HEALTH DESK

The new report updated in The Lancet Commission on Pollution and Health, published in The Lancet Planetary Health, states that although the number of deaths from pollution sources associated with extreme poverty (such as indoor air pollution and water pollution) has decreased, these reductions are offset by increased deaths attributable to industrial pollution (such as ambient air pollution and chemical pollution). Low- and middle-income countries suffer the most from pollution's health effects. The 2017 Lancet Commission on Pollution and Health found that pollution was responsible for nine million deaths – 16% of all deaths globally. Of the nine million pollution-attributable deaths in 2019, air pollution (both household and ambient) remains responsible for the greatest deaths at 6.67 million worldwide. Water pollution was responsible for 1.36 million premature deaths. Lead contributed 900,000 premature deaths, followed by toxic occupational hazards at 870,000 deaths. The decline in deaths from traditional pollution since 2000 (household air pollution from solid fuels and unsafe water) is most evident in Africa. This can be explained by water supply and sanitation improvements, antibiotics and treatments, and cleaner fuels. Ambient air pollution was responsible for 4.5



million deaths in 2019, up from 4.2 million deaths in 2015 and 2.9 million in 2000. Deaths from hazardous chemical pollutants increased from 0.9 million in 2000 to 1.7 million in 2015 to 1.8 million in 2019, with 900,000 deaths attributable to lead pollution in 2019. Overall, deaths from modern pollution have increased by 66 per cent in the past two decades, from an estimated 3.8 million deaths in 2000 to 6.3 million deaths in 2019. Figures on deaths from chemical pollutants are likely to be underestimated as only a small number of manufactured chemicals in commerce have been adequately tested for safety or toxicity. Excess deaths due to pollution have led to economic losses totalling US\$ 4.6 trillion in 2019, equating to 6-2% of global economic output. The study also notes pollution's deep inequity, with 92% of pollution-related deaths and the greatest burden of pollution's economic losses occurring in low-income and middle-income countries. Climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss are linked. A globally supported, formal science-policy interface is needed to inform intervention, influence research, and guide funding. Pollution is usually viewed as a local issue addressed through sub-national and national regulation or regional policy in higher-income regions. But, pollution is a global problem, requiring a global response to address its causes, dispersal, and health impacts.



## Tips for maintaining good health

A balanced diet, exercise, and relaxation are vital to optimal health. Here are some tips for staying healthy: **Eat healthy foods:** Your body needs more than 40 distinct nutrients. Your diet should contain carbohydrates, protein, fruits, vegetables, and dairy. **Control your portion size:** A medium-sized piece of fruit is one serving. A cup of pasta equates to 2 servings, and a pint of ice cream contains 4 servings. **Do not skip meals:** Skipping meals can lead to out-of-control hunger and frequently over-indulging. **Drink water:** Water helps not only to hydrate but also to aid in blood circulation, the removal of toxins from our bodies, and the regulation of our body temperatures. Avoid too much caffeine. **Exercise regularly:** Get at least 30 minutes of activity every day. If the idea of sweating at the gym for hours on end doesn't sound appealing to you, then head outside for a game of ultimate Frisbee. Or, try going for a walk or a run. The important thing is that you get moving! Maintain positive social health. A healthy lifestyle prevents diseases and keeps you away from chronic illnesses. Good habits strengthen your immune system and help you stay fit.

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