

Health dept working on midwives, nurses' dev

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE, April 19: The Punjab Health Department is focussing more on the development of community midwives and specialized nurses than the production of doctors.

This was stated by Punjab Health Secretary Sohail Ahmad while responding to a question about the brain-drain of doctors during the social sector reforms session at the Punjab Development Forum organized by the Punjab Planning and Development Department at a local hotel on Tuesday.

"We do not need more doctors but the community midwives and nurses to take care of patients at primary healthcare level," he said.

The secretary said it was an experience of international health and donor agencies that strengthening of primary healthcare services, placement of midwives and nurses, and preventive measures were more cost-effective than the disease cure system.

Earlier, giving his presentation on "strategic reforms in health sector in Punjab: issues and prospects," the secretary said the health department was putting emphasis on primary healthcare and preventive services. He said the department was working to target health services to the poor, women and children.

Mr Ahmad said the department was in the process of introducing legislative and regulatory amendments; designing and implementation of organizational and system modifications; rationalization of human resource planning and production.

He said the focus was on dissemination of quality services and building partnerships with the private sector organizations. He said the department would also introduce the culture of information-based decision making.

Explaining health facilities, teaching and training institutions and department's staff strength, the secretary said the government had last year enhanced development budget by 130 per cent. He said the government had also com-

mitted to extend Rs3 billion for development projects during the next financial year. While, he said, the department would also get additional Rs6 billion for next three years under the Punjab Devolved Social Services Programme (PDSSP).

During the last two years, he said the department was providing free services in the emergency departments of 14 tertiary and teaching hospitals. He said the project that also provided dedicated staff for emergency services on enhanced salary packages costed Rs1.5 billion. He said the department also launched a pilot project of Punjab Emergency and Ambulance Services (PEAS) in Lahore with a total cost of Rs100 million.

He said the project would now be replicated in seven other former divisional headquarters. He said the department was also establishing Multan Institute of Cardiology with an estimated cost of Rs1 billion.

The secretary said the health department was strengthening preventive and promotive services that included reduction in communicable diseases, focus on the rural poor as well as a national programme for public healthcare, family planning and introduction of school health services. He also explained other projects being executed by the department.

Earlier, Punjab Health Minister Dr Tahir Ali Javed gave an overview of the health sector. He said the State was serving masses with a bottom line of services instead of profitability, being pursued by the private sector.

He said the department was committed to improve primary healthcare services, public health education and preventive healthcare services.

EDUCATION: Education Secretary Javed Aslam said the Punjab Education Sector Reforms Programme (PESRP) had helped increase enrolment by 12.7 per cent and female enrolment (in selected 15 districts where girls

were given stipend) by 23 per cent.

He said the department had given stipend to 216,000 girl students.

Under the PESRP, he said the department distributed 32.16 million book-jackets, which contained three to four books each. He said the department recruited 29,000 graduate teachers.

In future, Mr Aslam said the department would focus on qualitative and quantitative requirements. He said the qualitative requirements would be fulfilled through improved quality of teachers, ensuring teacher attendance, improving enrolment, discouraging dropouts, improving education management, promote gender parity, build public-private partnerships, and improving examination and assessment mechanism.

With regard to quantitative requirements, he said, the department was working to develop infrastructure for creation of school districts concepts, identifying new missing facilities in schools and providing those facilities for better school environment, merging girls and boys schools at primary level.

Punjab Education Minister Mian Imran Masood presented an overview of the education sector. He said there were 63,000 schools with an enrolment of nine million. But the matter of concern was the dropout issue as almost four million students used to drop out from the school stream every year.

He said the government had also created four new departments by separating different wings of the education department. He said the department was now taking care of general school, college and university education. While the newly created departments were special education, literacy and non-formal basic education, sports and Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (Tevta).

During the last two years, he said, the government enhanced Rs1 billion development

budget to Rs7 billion besides additional funds of \$300 million from the World Bank.

He said the PESRP had helped reduce dropout and increased enrolment. He said that now around one million new students were entering school education stream.

Mr Masood said the department was working to make its schools attractive to meet the challenge of students' retention in schools.

MULTIPLE INDICATORS CLUSTER SURVEY 2003-04: Giving a presentation on the Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (MICS), Punjab chief economist Dr Shaheen Khan said the survey was conducted by the government with the financial and technical support of the Unicef to develop a district-based credible baseline for socio-economic status.

Dr Khan said the survey focused on households, child and women and the results needed to be taken seriously for future planning and development.

Speaking about MICS results, she said the literacy rate among adult women was very low and there was a need to launch a special literacy campaign. She said this campaign was immediately required in D.G. Khan, Bhakkar, Lodhran and Bahawalpur districts where adult women literacy rate was less than 30 per cent.

She said the Punjab's overall primary school enrolment was 51 per cent, while the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) required 91 per cent enrolment by 2011.

Dr Khan said the under five years of age mortality rate was 112 per 1,000 live births, while MDGs required 65 by 2011 and 52 by 2015.

The infant mortality rate (IMR) in Punjab is 77 per 1,000 live births, while MDGs require 50 by 2011 and 40 by 2015.

The rate of households being covered by the Lady Health Workers (LHWs) was 35 per cent in Punjab, while MDGs required 92 per cent by 2011.

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With regard to the usage of modern methods

of contraception by women in Punjab, Dr Khan said the survey revealed that the existing contraceptive prevalence rate was 27 per cent, while MDGs require 53 per cent by 2011 and 55 by 2015.

The survey about malnourishment of children under five years of age (underweight for age) showed that such children were 34 per cent in Punjab. The MDGs require to decrease this rate to 28 per cent by 2011 and less than 20 per cent by 2015.

About drinking water supply, the survey said 64 per cent population had access to piped water. This ratio needed to be enhanced by 84 per cent by 2011 and 93 per cent by 2015.

With regard to the type of toilet facility, the survey revealed that 42 per cent population had access to drainage. This rate needed to be enhanced by 63 per cent by 2011 and 90 per cent by 2015. Dr Khan said the districts — D.G. Khan, Layyah, Muzzafargarh, Rajanpur, Jhang, Narowal, Lodhran and Bhakkar — needed to prioritize provision of toilet facilities where open spaces were being used by over 60 per cent population.

Making concluding remarks, National Commission for Human Development Chairman Dr Nasim Ashraf stressed that every citizen must get equal opportunities to hone their God-given abilities.

He lauded the health department's vision for promoting midwives and nurses. He called for institutionalizing health and education sector reforms to ensure that their fruits could reach to people on sustainable basis in future.

Stressing universal primary education, he said, it could be the agent of change in developing enlightened moderation in the country.

Chief Minister's Adviser Saadia S. Chaudhry and Punjab Social Welfare Department Secretary Saeed Ahmad Khan also spoke on the occasion.