**Healthcare Conundrum in Punjab**

[Dr Zain Bhatti](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/dr-zain-bhatti/%22%20%5Co%20%22More%20Articles%20by%20Dr%20Zain%20Bhatti)

June 11, 2024

As I sit down to write about the healthcare system of hospitals in my hometown of Gujranwala, and elsewhere in Punjab, I am reminded of the iconic song “Moonlight Serenade.” Just like the smooth melodies and harmonies, healthcare should be a symphony of services, working in perfect harmony to provide quality care to patients. However, the reality on the ground is far from this ideal scenario.

Every hospital is sick; every health facility needs a healing touch.

One thing which this government is doing, and which its predecessors have been doing, is playing to the gallery instead of understanding the healthcare system’s challenges.

Despite efforts to improve healthcare (through more and more fund allocations), the system faces significant challenges.

The mother of all issues is unsatisfied with doctors.

The shortage of doctors and medical staff is a glaring issue, with ad-hoc regularization of doctors being insufficient. When a doctor is not certain of their career path, they will lack the energy which must be visible in a hospital.

Every hospital is sick; every health facility needs a healing touch.

I would like Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz to visit randomly selected BHUs and RHCs. The lack of incubators for newborns in basic health units and rural health centre facilities is alarming, and limited access to life-saving medical equipment is a major concern. Rural areas, particularly women in labour, have insufficient healthcare services. Only 19 functional BHUs for gyne delivery in peri-urban areas is a stark reminder of the gaps in the system.

Emergency services are non-existent after 2 pm, leaving patients in a state of distress.

Instead of delivering something for the welfare of doctors, the government came up with ‘Clinic on Wheels’.

The Punjab government’s “Clinics on Wheels” programme, launched with much fanfare, has failed to deliver. These mobile clinics were supposed to provide basic healthcare services to slum areas, but they lacked essential equipment and staff. Patients are often referred to far-off hospitals, which adds to their financial burden.

The program’s limited scope and inadequate resources have made it ineffective in addressing the healthcare needs of rural communities. This programme is an offshoot of other show-off programmes, such as the “Laptop Scheme” and “Yellow Cab Scheme”. These programmes have also been criticized for their lack of focus on sustainability and clear-headed goals.

These initiatives have been deemed political stunts, aimed at garnering votes rather than improving healthcare. The government’s priorities seem to be misplaced, with more emphasis on technology and transportation than on providing quality healthcare services.

What should the government do to improve the health of hospitals?

Well, it starts with healing doctors. Doctors face career insecurity, with their services being terminated on petty whims. A proper service structure is essential to ensure their career progression and job security. Other than their job security, their safety on hospital premises has become an issue. Hospital security is insufficient, with doctors being harassed and beaten by angry attendants.

Female doctors in Paed and Gynae departments are particularly vulnerable, and the government must deploy lady police for their protection after 2 pm in hospitals.

Rural and basic health units must be strengthened to provide quality care to patients. Medical officers should be incentivized to stay in BHU and RHU after 2 pm, which would help curb quackery and ensure paramedics do not masquerade as doctors. The government must also address the shortage of doctors and medical staff, provide proper equipment and services, and ensure that healthcare services are accessible to all, particularly in rural areas.

The Punjab government must be lauded for allocating a sufficient budget for health but the healthcare system will never be able to overcome its challenges if the right strategies are not implemented.

By addressing the shortage of doctors and medical staff, providing proper equipment and services, and strengthening rural healthcare, we can create a harmonious healthcare system that works for all. The government must prioritize healthcare over political gimmicks and focus on providing quality services to patients.

As I conclude this article, I am reminded of the iconic song “In the Mood.” Let us work together to create a healthcare system that is indeed “in the mood” for quality care and patient satisfaction.

*The writer is a practising doctor with an interest in socio-political issues. He can be reached at drzainalibhatti@gmail.com*