

Telemedicine shows us light at the end of the tunnel

“I never think of the future. It comes soon enough.”- Albert Einstein, Nobel Laureate in Physics (1921), aphorism 1945-46, Einstein archives 36-570

Dear Editor,

Garg *et al.* inform us the benefits & pitfalls of embracing virtual care during Covid-19 pandemic. When physical meeting becomes risky affair, all the surrounding objects appear to contain virus, hospitals sometimes become hotspots of the epidemic & human resources seem to be in short supply; telemedicine appears like a ray of hope in these times. The authors draw an overview of the global scenario & then picture relevant India specific points.^[1]

What we conclude from the Commentary is that at present healthcare provision is possible through virtual network & at the same time there are a few challenges we've to face, technology fixes we've to make, legal issues we've to solve & privacy issues we've to pay attention to. & On a broad scale when holding hands of a patient, & consoling distraught family members is not possible while providing healthcare, we are exploring state- of- the -art technology^[2] to reach those who need us the most now. Looking at the situation in this view, we learn that like healthcare, availing broadband too is a social good. & Those standing at the end of the queue- the poor, the marginalized, the underdog- need it the most as they won't find it feasible to be attended physically when those having all the wherewithal find it difficult to have a bed.

Hence what we propose is an idea that like healthcare, providing broadband to all is responsibility of the State. What is happening at present in India is anything but that. Right now players providing telecom services to consumers are shrinking at an alarming speed. While a decade ago there were about a dozen service providers, now the sector is run by three players alone (&

dominated by one).^[3] Besides, there is fundamental difference between working culture of public sector versus private one. While public sector alone can be entrusted to reach remote & unprofitable areas; basic motto of private business is to look at their bottomline (read profit). Private business is there to earn profit by increasing their consumer base in densely populated areas. Therefore when public sector enterprise, the BSNL, announces voluntary retirement scheme for its employees; we'd all be concerned.^[4]

Belatedly when we are becoming aware of profiteering by a few private hospitals & clinics^[5] (although most of them are fighting bravely/honestly against the virus), reaching reliable information & nearby facilities is possible by using their phones is the only option for the poor. & If they face difficulty to exercise that option, all of us are losers as those needing truthful healthcare information the most are left out of the network. If we want to have a hold over the virus, reaching out to that last person is as much important as the first one. Hence is the case for public control over telecom for the benefit of the population at large.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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