

The Suno India Show

Delhi overwhelmed with rising COVID cases; non-COVID patients left in a lurch

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"Woh aakde dikhate hai aane waale samay mai Delhi mai Corona bahut tezi se failne wala hai, 30 June tak 1 lakh case hojynge, 15 July tak 2.25 lakh case hojayenge Aur 31 July tak lagbhag 5 lakh 32 hazar case hojayenge delhi mai total aur isko dekhte hue hume 15 june tak 6,681 beds ki jarurat padegi, 30 June tak 15,000 beds ki jarurat padegi, 15 July tak 33000 beds ki jarurat padegi, 31 July tak 80,000 beds ki zarurat padegi."

- Arvind Kejriwal (Delhi Chief Minister)

Kunika Balhotra (Host): With over 41,000 COVID-19 cases, Delhi, the national capital, is the third-worst affected state in the country after Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. Last week, Lieutenant Governor Anil Baijal overruled Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's decision on keeping hospitals in the city open to Delhi residents only and to limit the scope of COVID19 testing. The Union Home Minister Amit Shah held a meeting with the leaders of all political parties of Delhi to discuss the novel coronavirus situation in the state. He had announced that COVID-19 testing will be doubled in the state in the next two days and subsequently tripled. He further added that COVID-19 tests would be started at every polling station in the containment zones and a comprehensive house-to-house health survey would be conducted in the hotspots for contact tracing. In view of the shortage of beds for coronavirus patients in Delhi, the Indian Railways suspended the train services from the Anand Vihar railway station as the platforms have been reserved for the deployment of isolation coaches for coronavirus patients in the state.

The Delhi government has been repeatedly claiming that there is no shortage of beds and that is working round the clock and making every possible effort for saving each and every life even as Delhi CM announced that the government and private hospitals would be reserved for the Delhi residents only till the COVID19 cases are contained in the state. The Delhi government received a lot of flak for this decision. The Delhi government has also levelled serious allegations of mismanagement on the Union government under which hospitals such as RML, AIIMS and others fall under. The National Human Rights Commission issued a notice to Delhi Government and the Union Health Ministry over serious allegations about covid mismanagement including non-availability of beds, inadequate number of tests,

increasing deaths and delay in last rites of the deceased in the state. Looking at the surge in positive COVID19 cases, a Public Interest Litigation was filed in the Delhi High Court, seeking strict lockdown in the state.

Hi I am Kunika Balhotra, Research and Communications officer for Suno India and I will be your host for this episode of The Suno India Show. To know more about the current situation in the national capital and how prepared is Delhi to contain the coronavirus, I reached out to Inayat Singh Kakar, a public health researcher and a public health activist who works with Jan Swasthya Abhiyan, a national platform that coordinates activities and actions on health and health care across the country.

Inayat Singh Kakar (Guest): My name is Inayat. I am a public health researcher, and I'm a health rights activist with Jan Swasthya Abhiyan. Currently, I am a member of the Medical Support Group, which is a voluntary group of public health professionals, doctors, nurses, lawyers, journalists, lay citizens and we have all been for the past I mean, ever since the start of the pandemic, we have been assisting patients in Delhi access health care in hospitals.

Host- So now that you have been actively working according to you, what is the current situation of Delhi and is the state prepared to accommodate patients from other states?

Guest- Ah, see, I don't understand, You know what the Delhi government really means When they say accommodate patients from other states because it almost makes it sound as if you don't, people are catching flights and people are travelling during, you know this pandemic, to Delhi to seek care. But that is really not the case regarding the current status of Delhi, I mean, we know that testing is not happening. As for the levels that it showed in the past few days testing has been disrupted. The private laboratories have alleged that it is the government that has told them to not test so, there are issues with testing and there are continuously you know, even on Twitter you see a lot of videos and messages being posted by people saying that we're not getting access to hospitals that we aren't we are being denied care and we are reaching hospitals. So, you know, the current situation is a little bit worrying in terms of controlling the pandemic.

Host- Also, the Delhi health minister said that there would be around 30,000 more cases in the state in the next 12 to 15 days and Manish Sisodia also said that by July 31, there would be 5.5 lakh cases in the state.

Guest- Yeah. And I mean, you know, if you look at those numbers, experts and epidemiologists are saying that about 5 to 10% will require hospitalization. And, you know, a small percentage of that will also require ICU ventilator support. So, if we take the figure of

5.5 lakhs and if we try to see what five to 10% of that could be, it is really high and the number of beds may not be sufficient to accommodate so many people coming to the hospitals.

Host- Also, the centre has said that there is no community transmission in the state, looking at an increase in the number of cases per day. What do you think?

Guest- I don't agree that you know the large number of health workers in AIIMS who don't have anything to do with COVID patients have also tested positive. So I and there are a lot of public experts who have also said that it has definitely entered into a stage of community transmission. And the health minister of Delhi, you know, pretty much said that we cannot announce community transmission and you know that they're waiting for the centre to announce it, but his statement almost seems like an admission that there is community transmission, but just that they can't declare it before the centre declares it. So I think to say that there is no community transmission is a little bit naive.

Host- What do you think what steps should the Delhi government take in order to tackle the situation? Should they rope in the Mohalla Clinics?

Guest- Um, see, that's a very broad question. But I mean, one, they definitely need to ramp up testing. Second, there needs to be better coordination between all the hospitals to ensure that nobody who is accessing treatment is denied treatment, because I know that's happening a lot. It's really not a good idea for a COVID positive person to be moving from hospital to hospital coming into contact with more and more people to you know, and I mean, and only increases the chances of spreading. So I think they definitely need to address that lack of coordination, they definitely need to, you know, have some system where they are managing people, because I know there's a lot of panic, you know when everybody's just reaching hospitals and, you know, and there's a lot of panic among people because there is no clarity among people about you know, what is home quarantine how to do it. There was recently a patient who was sent home from one of the Delhi government hospitals and he was told to home quarantine and there are guidelines to do that. But nobody in the hospital explained to the family how to home quarantine, and our group was contacted by the son. And it was the father who was the patient and the son contacted, contacted our group And he was so worried and he was so, you know, frantic and he was saying, he said, You know that my father has just been sent home and I have other family members and I have a child. And we don't know what to do now. And he was, you know, panicking and saying that I'm going to, I'm going to kill myself and I'm going to commit suicide with my entire family. So there needs to be better communication with people there needs to be, you know, better dissemination, dissemination of what the protocol calls are,

of what the initiatives by the government are to really quell this panic. And of course, you need to expand the capacity of the state to take in COVID patients, but that cannot happen, you know, in a haphazard, you know, almost sort of random way. And one of them being that you know, you need to harness the capacity of the private sector in simply allowing hospitals to, to set up beds and tools set up, you know beds for treating COVID does not guarantee and does not ensure access to those beds. So, you know, one of the things that we're seeing in Delhi is that overpricing there is overcharging of people who are going to private hospitals. So, you need to bring in very stringent, you know and when implemented price control mechanisms, so that people are not getting fleeced, there are hospitals, who are charging deposits before a patient can be admitted. And the Delhi government has also recognized this in an order in relation to I think CGHS patients. So the government realizes that there are these profiteering practices that are going on. So they need to come down, you know, on hospitals to curb these practices, and we are not seeing that happen. And, you know, an unfortunate consequence of, of this expansion, you know, for overtreatment has been, I mean, they have this unplanned expansion You know, to the degree that non covered patients are suffering. I mean, you know, for the past two months, pregnant women are not getting access to hospitals, cancer patients are left without treatment cancer patients who were earlier getting medicines from government hospitals like the Delhi state Cancer Institute have been left without medicines. So, your action plan to control it cannot then hum you know, non-COVID patients because I mean, you know, those conditions and those problems continue to exist, so you need to address that as well. So, there needs to be more planning there needs to be, you know, better integration and coordination within the system to ensure that everybody is taken care of.

Host- Yeah, the union health ministry has said that action will be initiated against all CGHS empanelled hospitals if they deny.

Guest- Even the Delhi government has said that you know, various times that action will be initiated. But, despite that this profiteering continues. And the Delhi government has powers under the Epidemic Disease Act, which is in fact one of the acts that they had sighted to bring in their illegal order to curb hospital access. So, they have powers under that epidemic diseases act to rein in the private sector. They can also requisition private sector capacity, they can have standard rates, which they set with these private hospitals and they can requisition their capacity and you know, and there are various states which are doing this in, in various forms and under various models, so, why not requisition that capacity? And make sure that, that people are not left without care because, you know, the financial constraints. And what's really missing from the entire strategy is coordinating with

the civil society. And if you see in the past two months, the civil society has stepped in a lot, whether it was distributing rations, whether it was getting, you know, workers back to their home states, whether it was our group, which has been coordinating access to health, you know, so these are groups which have their own ground, you know, which had their ear to the ground, these are groups that have that experience, and the government could really rope in some of these groups and could really harness some of this experience, too, you know, to perform more effectively. So, I mean, my appeal, as you know, a health rights practitioner, would be that the government involves civil society, the government, listen to what we are telling them and we also have, you know, volunteers that can be harnessed by the state government.

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