

CHARITABLE HOSPITALS EXCEED EXPECTATIONS

By Lata Mishra, Mumbai Mirror | Updated: Aug 7, 2017, 08.23 AM IST



Lilavati, Jaslok, Nanavati, Hinduja say spending more than the mandatory 2% of annual income in treating the poor

City's top private charitable hospitals such as Lilavati, Jaslok, Nanavati and Hinduja have claimed that they are not lacking on the charity front. According to a report submitted by the Association of Private Hospitals (AOH) to the Charity Commissioner, Mumbai, the hospitals spent about Rs 80 crore in the financial year 2016-2017 on providing treatment to the poor. This, the association said, is more than two per cent of the hospitals' annual incomes that they have to mandatorily spend on treating poor

patients. ? The association comprises 53 charitable trust hospitals.

After repeated complaints about charitable hospitals not providing treatment to poor patients, the state government last year took several steps to cross-check the charity work being done by the 79 charitable hospitals in the city. It launched a dedicated website to give details about the beds reserved for the patients from weaker sections in charitable hospitals. It is now mandatory for the hospitals to provide such details.

The government also appointed 25 arogya sevaks in charitable hospitals to monitor their charity activities and ensure that they don't turn away poor patients.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis announced in the Assembly during the Monsoon session last year that the state government had initiated action against those charitable hospitals which were not admitting poor patients. The government acted against 12 errant hospitals, withdrawing concessions such as subsidised water and electricity.

Mumbai Mirror in a recent report highlighted how the charitable hospitals had set themselves on a collision course with the government by not allowing arogya sevaks space on their premises.

Charitable hospitals are not only built on the land provided to them at concessional rates by the government, they also enjoy several other benefits such as lower power and water tariffs and waiver of duty on imported medical equipment. In return, these hospitals are required to set aside 20 per cent of their beds for poor patients and provide them free treatment under the Bombay Public Trusts Act.

The state has around 368 charitable hospitals, including 79 in Mumbai, with about 40,000 beds between them. The Mumbai hospitals have about 1,500 beds.

According to the Bombay High Court's 2006 order, charitable hospitals shall reserve 10 per cent of their operational beds for the indigent patients (those with an annual income of Rs 50,000 or below) and provide them treatment free of cost. Another 10 per cent of the beds are required to be reserved at concessional rates for patients with an income above Rs 50,000 but below Rs 1lakh.

Nanavati Hospital in Juhu spent Rs 6.2 crore in the last financial year, and according to hospital authorities, they have been fulfilling their charity obligations regularly. "From April to July, we have spent Rs 2.37 crore on charity. This is over the two per cent obligation of Rs 1.75 crore," Dr. Rajendra Patankar, COO of Nanavati Hospital, told Mumbai Mirror. He said the hospital treats on an average 250 patients free of cost every year.

"This year, we have done more charity; maybe because the hospital got new doctors on board, its quality care was improved further and new departments were opened," Dr. Patankar said.

Lilavati Hospital says it has spent Rs 3.46 crore on treating poor patients so far this year. Dr. Ajay Kumar Pande, vice-president, Lilavati Hospital, told Mumbai Mirror, "Now, everything is online. We have to submit details about each patient receiving treatment in the reserved 20 per cent beds, so nothing to hide. We have already spent more than two per cent of our income on providing treatment to the poor. From April to May, we spent Rs 62 lakh."

He said the hospital continues to help the needy patients even after meeting its charity obligations. "Though the charity commissioner's office told us that we can stop after the two per cent obligation is met, we can't deny treatment to poor patients if they approach us."

Dr Tarang Gianchandani, CEO of Jaslok Hospital, said they have been meeting their charity obligations regularly. "We have done total charity of Rs.4.5 crore this year. Majority of the patients who got free treatment are transplant cases." Many other complicated cases, requiring tertiary multidisciplinary care, were also handled, she said.

Dr Gianchandani said that apart from indigent or weaker sections, the Jaslok Hospital also gets poor patients with no income certificate or ration cards, and in such cases, it waives off the bill considering them special cases.

Commenting on the contribution by member hospitals, Dr PM Bujang, president, Association of Hospitals, said, "Medical expenses are seeing a steep rise these days. It is very difficult for a common man to meet expenses incurred due to uncalled medical emergencies. AOH members are giving and will continue to give the best medical treatment to the society and improve the overall healthcare standards in the country."

What is more important, Dr Bujang said, the same doctors and surgeons who treat the paying patients look after the poor patients too. "Thus, there is no discrimination between paying and poor patients in terms of quality doctors, medical facilities and equipment," said Dr Bujang.