

India, U.K. call for more funds to tackle diabetes

Two-day summit being organised by the Indo-British Health Initiative

Special Correspondent

CHENNAI: Listening to top government representatives of India and Britain at the Indo UK Diabetes Summit here, it scarcely failed to impress the audience on two counts: firstly, that diabetes is a growing problem of great concern to both nations; and, more interestingly, that the disease deserves a lot more attention and funds than it currently gets.

Anna Soubry, British Health Minister, said: "In the UK, we have a serious problem with diabetes. We should be doing more... We don't spend the sort of money we should be spending on such diseases." Money, and an indomitable will, are needed, she said, also stressed the role of governments in prevention of diseases and how politicians could raise the profile of a disease.

Keshav Desiraju, Principal Health Secretary, Union Ministry of Health, said that health policy in India is

- We don't spend the sort of money we should be spending on such diseases, says UK Minister
- Despite several programmes, follow up continues to be an issue: Principal Health Secretary

bring driven by infectious diseases. Perhaps justifiably so, given the nations development indicators, but the focus also needs to be on non-communicable diseases as well. While the National Rural Health Mission has focussed on strengthening the primary health care set up, more recently, massive screening programmes for diabetes and hypertension had been initiated, but follow up continues to be an issue.

But these were not the only points that the two leaders agreed on. They also agreed that there were many things that both nations could learn from each other - nursing care, training, treating complications of diabetes, non-communicable diseases, research, learn-

institutions. Preparations are on to arrive at an MoU between the two nations, reiterating areas of common interest in the health sector, Mr. Desiraju said.

V. Mohan, chairman of the conference and Dr. Mohan's Diabetes Specialities Centre, said India had vast experience in treating diabetes, and made references to some seminal research work conducted in this part of the country - both in prevention and treatment. No doubt it was a health emergency for India, which is estimated to have about 62 million diabetics (according to ICMR Indiab study) and nearly 72 million pre diabetics. Scaling up successful prevention interventions in larger communities would be the way forward.

Andrew Boulton from the

Manchester Royal Infirmary said all projected figures for diabetes in the world are going to be out of date, and the biggest growth is going to be in areas that can least afford them.

An expert in diabetes and its complications, Dr. Boulton said one lesson that the UK had learnt from India was how to look after the diabetic foot.

Mike Nithavrianakis, British Deputy High Commissioner, said the two-day summit being organised by the Indo-British Health Initiative (IBHI), was the largest bilateral health care event between India and the UK.

IBHI founder Prithvi Mohandas said the summit hoped to foster synergy through strategic partnerships between professionals in the health care industry in the field of diabetes between both nations.

Vijay Vishwanathan of the MV Hospital for Diabetes further elaborated on the objectives of holding the summit.



Prithvi Mohandas, founder, Indo British Health Initiative (left); V. Mohan (second left), chairman, Dr. Mohan's Diabetes Specialities Centre; Anna Soubry, U.K. Health Minister; Andrew Boulton (third left), of the Manchester Royal Infirmary; Keshav Desiraju (third right), Principal Secretary, Union Ministry of Health; and Mike Nithavrianakis, British Deputy High Commissioner (right), at the Indo-UK Diabetes Summit in Chennai on Friday. - PHOTO: V. GANESAN