

Twenty Questions and Answers on A System for Universal Health Care

What is it?

How can we hope to achieve it?



SATHI

(Support for Advocacy and Training to Health Initiatives)

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What is it? And how can we hope to achieve it?

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Introduction

Various pro-people bodies working on health issues like Jan Swasthya Abhiyan have been advocating since many years to ensure 'Health and Health Care for All' in India. There has not been much positive response from the State so far to this demand. However, during the recent period, several opportunities as well as threats have emerged in the health care scenario in India. Given the background of weak and under-resourced public health services combined with dominant, often unaffordable and irrational private medical care, there is a tremendous social need to bring in a system which would ensure access for all to appropriate and good quality health care. In this context, now proposals for universalising access to health care are emerging on the national agenda. At the level of civil society organisations, Medico Friend Circle has been debating and working out possible directions for a system for 'Universal Access to Health Care' (UAHC), while at official level, in October 2011, the High Level Expert Group (HLEG) of the Planning Commission has submitted its report on 'Universal Health Coverage'. Based on this setting, we feel that it is relevant for health professionals, health activists and socially concerned persons to understand some of the key concepts related to UHC, so that many more people can meaningfully and actively contribute to the ongoing debates and discussions. Considering the fact that differing 'versions' of UHC are in circulation, which have widely different implications for the future of the health system in India, it is very important that pro-people networks, organisations and individuals understand the nuances of this issue and take stands that would ensure that UHC in India does not primarily become an avenue for further profiteering by the corporate health and insurance sector, but instead of that a

'public-centred' vision for Universal Health Care is actualised in the coming period. Keeping in mind this situation, SATHI is publishing this booklet which it hopes, will help activists and interested persons in understanding some basics of this important theme.

A SATHI team (Drs. Anant Phadke, Abhay Shukla, Nilangi Sardeshpande) conceptualized, planned and steered the preparation of this booklet including incorporation of comments from the reviewers and preparing the final draft. The basic draft of this booklet has been ably prepared by Dr. Amita Pitre, who collated information from a wide variety of sources to present this complex topic with a pro-people perspective, in intelligible form. Dr. Abhijeet More of SATHI has helped in obtaining feedback on the draft. We are grateful to Renu Khanna, Dr. Indira Chakravarthi and Ravi Duggal who have provided several useful suggestions as reviewers, while of course the views expressed in the final booklet remain the responsibility of the publishers. Sharda Mahalle has capably done the layout and design of the booklet to prepare it for publication. We would like to acknowledge the many discussions in Medico Friend Circle and Jan Swasthya Abhiyan over the last few years on the theme of 'Universal Access to Health Care/Health Care for All' which have informed many of the views and analysis presented in the following pages, and hope that this booklet would be a small contribution towards the massive task of ensuring 'Health and Health Care for All' in India.

Abhay Shukla
SATHI



Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome
ART	Anti Retroviral therapy
AYUSH	Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy
BPL	Below Poverty Line
CBMP	Community Based Monitoring and Planning
CHW	Community Health Worker
DHKI	District Health Knowledge Institute
ESIS	Employees State Insurance Scheme
FCC	First Contact Care
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
HCA	Health Care for All
HFA	Health for All
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HLEG	High Level Expert Group
HRH	Human Resources for Health

JSA	Jan Swasthya Abhiyan
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NCHRH	National Council for Human Resources in Health
NHS	National Health System
NHSO	National Health Security Officer
NSSO	National Sample Survey Organisation
PPP	Public Private Partnership
PRC	People's Republic of China
RRT	Renal Replacement Therapy
RSBY	Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana
SATHI	Support for Advocacy and Training to Health Initiatives
UAHC	Universal Access to Health Care
UHC	Universal Health Care
WHO	World Health Organisation

Contents

Introduction.....	3
Abbreviations.....	5
Questions and Answers about UHC	
1. What exactly do we mean by a system for 'Universal Health Care' (UHC)?.....	11
2. Why is it necessary to have a system for universal access? What are the problems with our current health care system?.....	13
3. Why are we talking about UHC today? Does it mean we are no longer talking about 'Health for All' or Right to improved public health services?.....	15
4. What is the overall aim and what are the objectives of the UHC system?.....	18
5. What would be the principles and core elements of the UHC system?	18
6. Has any country been able to ensure UHC for its people?.....	21
7. The countries mentioned above are rich countries. Has any developing country been able to practice UHC? Has any country in Asia tried it out?.....	21
8. What are the requirements to establish UHC in any country?.....	23
9. What would be the specificities of UHC in a developing country like India?.....	24

10. What mode of financing has been used in UHCs? Can private health insurance be the basis of UHC?.....	25
11. What is the spectrum of services which countries make available to their citizens under UHC?.....	30
12. Who provides services in a UHC system? Does the patient have to pay for services when they go to the doctor?.....	31
13. How is the UHC system regulated to prevent malpractices?.....	32
14. How have countries benefitted from improvement in health care coverage after UHC was adopted?.....	35
15. What is NOT a system for 'Universal Health Care'?.....	36
16. Above we have mostly discussed about access to health care. Would that be sufficient to ensure better health for people?.....	38
17. What would be a more suitable model for financing such a system in India? How can the government raise the necessary scale of funds?.....	40
18. Why do some countries have UHC systems while others do not? What is the role of political will in ensuring UHC systems?.....	41
19. Can this become a reality for India? Has there been any attempt to advocate UHC in India?.....	43
20. What can we do to further this demand and ensure UHC in India? What would be some of the first steps and social-political efforts required to move towards such a system in India?.....	44
Annexure.....	49
Recommendations of the High Level Expert Group (HLEG) on UHC and Key Issues Concerning These Recommendations	

Twenty Questions and Answers about A System for Universal Health Care What is it? How can we hope to achieve it?

This booklet answers 20 key questions on Universal Health Care (UHC). It explains how good quality, appropriate Health Care which is free at the point of service, can be made available to everybody in India within the coming decade or so.

This booklet first explains basic concepts like what is exactly meant by Universal Health Care; what are the core principles of UHC etc.

It then turns to the experiences of various countries including some developing countries of moving towards the goal of UHC and basic requirements as regards financing, provisioning, governance, which have to be fulfilled to realize the goal of UHC.

Lastly, the booklet discusses the specificities of the Indian situation, including the need to strengthen, expand the Public Health System and to regulate the private providers. This last section also discusses the first steps that need to be taken in face of the huge challenges we face in India along the road to 'Health Care for All', which is part of the larger goal of 'Health for All'.

Various pro-people bodies working on health issues like Jan Swasthya Abhiyan have been advocating since 2000, 'Health and Health Care for All' in India. Now Universal Health Care has begun to figure in the official agenda. Perhaps as a preparation for the next Lok Sabha election in 2014, the Prime Minister's Office fostered the appointment of a 'High Level Expert Group' (HLEG) by the Planning Commission to prepare a 'blueprint' for achieving Universal Health Coverage in India by 2020. It's report is being considered for formulating the 12th Five Year plan and a number of debatable issues are emerging. With Universal Health Care developing into an important national issue, this booklet would be of interest to a wide audience, including health activists, health professionals, researchers, trade unionists, journalists and social-political activists.