

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
ON THE OCCASION THE CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS OF
MEDICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME OF CHRISTIAN MEDICAL
COLLEGE**

Vellore, May 4, 2018

1. I am happy to be in Vellore for this event to mark the Centenary of Medical Education at the Christian Medical College. I congratulate the institution, which is ranked third among all medical colleges in India as per the Ministry of Human Resource Development, government of India. I also convey my best wishes to the students and faculty members of CMC Vellore, both past and present, as well as the doctors, researchers and administrators. Your institution and its achievements are a matter of pride for the entire country.
2. Completing 100 years is an occasion to both look back and take fresh guard. In this, CMC must take inspiration from the values and the idealism of its founder. In the early 20th century, shortly after graduating from Cornell University in the United States, Ida Sophia Scudder returned to India. This was the country where several generations of her family had lived and served. This was the country where medicine became her mission.
3. India was under colonial rule then and most people lived in tough conditions. Health indices were very poor. Average life expectancy was just about 24 years. One person died every minute of tuberculosis. One in four babies died in the first year. Cholera, smallpox and polio – several epidemics and diseases were rampant. Independence was still a dream. It was in such an India that Ida Sophia Scudder devoted her life to healthcare. In 1918, she set up a medical school that was initially open only to women. From 1947, both girls and boys began to study here.
4. India has come a long way since then. Revolutions in our economy, in agriculture and in technology have changed how we act, think and live. Inevitably, our health outcomes have also

improved. Average life expectancy is now above 68 years. Diseases such as polio and smallpox, which once claimed so many lives, have been defeated. Our immunisation programme is gaining strength. The government has launched Mission Indradhanush primarily to target hard-to-access areas and ensure all children benefit from immunisation.

5. Primary and secondary healthcare facilities have undergone a change for the better. In this context it must be said the state of Tamil Nadu has exceptional health indicators and remains a model for our country. Institutions such as CMC Vellore have contributed to this deserved reputation.
6. Public health is a global public good and a basic human right. Despite the strides we have taken as a country, there remain regional, rural-urban and gender and community imbalances in terms of health provision. Without adequately addressing these, we cannot rest. Without adequately addressing these, the mission of CMC will not be complete.
7. As societies evolve, economies develop and population patterns change, countries go through epidemiological transitions. India too is experiencing such a transition. It is marked by three challenges in disease control. And we have to manage all three simultaneously.
8. First, India has to reduce maternal and infant mortality as well as communicable diseases such as tuberculosis, vector-borne diseases such as malaria, water-borne diseases such as cholera, diarrhoeal diseases, and vaccine-preventable diseases like measles and tetanus. Second, India has to find an answer to the rise in non-communicable or lifestyle diseases – like diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and many cancers. And finally we need to develop systems to detect and cope with new and re-emerging infectious diseases like HIV, avian flu and H1N1 influenza. In a globalised world, with people travelling in and out of our country in larger and larger numbers, a few small cases can very quickly scale up into a large outbreak.

9. This three-pronged challenge calls for interventions across the continuum of care. It calls for prevention of disease, promotion of good health practices and treatment and cure in case of an illness. The impact of a health problem is cross-cutting – it affects a variety of sectors. The meeting of this challenge should also follow a multi-stakeholder approach. Government and civil society, private and public health care providers, charitable and economic institutions all have a role and a stake.
10. The National Health Mission, the National Health Policy and the Ayushman Bharat insurance scheme are alive to this broad-based approach. In their essence, they aim to ensure that nobody is deprived of healthcare due to the absence of financial or similar resources. The principles that must guide our philosophy of public health are equity and efficiency, quality and quantity, and access and affordability. Healthcare is above all else a service. Yes, it is also a business – but there is no greater business than saving a life. I am sure the CMC community will agree.
11. One of the principles that I referred to earlier is the principle of quantity – of filling the gap in healthcare professionals in our country. There is urgent need to do this, and to reform medical education so as to create room for more colleges and more medical graduates. Science and technology are most commonly applied to our benefit by engineers and doctors. In India we have 1.47 million undergraduate engineering seats, but only 67,352 undergraduate medical seats. And about 20 per cent of those seats were added in the past four years. As a country and a system, we need to address this gap quickly.

Ladies and Gentlemen

12. CMC Vellore has a justifiable reputation for excellence. India's first re-constructive surgery on leprosy patients was carried out here, and so was the first successful open heart surgery and the first kidney transplant. These are only some of your many achievements. A range of research takes place at CMC. Recent research on the rotavirus vaccine, hepatitis, malnutrition, bio-

engineering and stem cells underlines your commitment to research that is relevant to India's health needs.

13. I have been told that the medical education programme here combines professional expertise with social relevance and ethical practice. I understand clinical training in your hospital is complemented by placements in villages and underserved areas. This is commendable. Please keep it up. Doctors need a sharp mind – but much more than that, they need a warm heart. And CMC Vellore must continue to train doctors and nurses with warm hearts.

May this be your mission for the next 100 years and more!

Thank you

Jai Hind!