

Presidential Address
By
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Roundtable of Vice Chancellors of Health Science
Universities
(October 10-11, 2017)

Distinguished Chief Guest, Key Note Speaker Dr Soumya Swaminathan, Director General of ICMR and Secretary, Department of Health Research, Govt of India, Dr Ravi Kumar, Director cum Vice Chancellor Sri Venkateswara Institute of Medical Sciences, Triupati, Fellow Vice Chancellors, distinguished invitees, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am truly delighted to be with you on this momentous occasion of the *Roundtable of Vice Chancellors of Health Science Universities* organized by the Association of Indian Universities at the historic town of Triupati at Sri Venkateswara Institute of Medical Science in commemoration of the Silver Jubilee year of this prestigious Medical Institute. The authorities of the Institute have made the best arrangements for the fellow Vice Chancellors and Directors of Medical Science Institutes for the two day deliberations at this historic roundtable dedicated to revitalizing medical education, research and health care in India. I extend my sincere gratitude to Hon'ble Vice Chancellor Professor T S Ravi Kumar and his efficient team for hosting this highly important roundtable and for the excellent arrangements made. I extend a warm welcome to all the dignitaries and guests and to you fellow Vice Chancellors for sparing your valuable time to be with us at this historic round table conference.

The Association of Indian Universities, as you all may know was established on March 23, 1925 as Inter-University Board (IUB) of India, Burma and Ceylon to

bring together all the universities in India on a common platform to promote cooperation and coordination of growth of quality higher education and research and foster an environment in which education, culture and human values together shall build an enlightened human society deep rooted in the concept of *Sarve Bhavantu Sukhina, Sarve Santu Niramaya, Save Bhadrani Pasyanti, Ma kaschyate Dukh bhag bhavate*. Service to Society and service to Mother Nature was the supreme agenda besides service the Self, the Atman. Persons of high eminence such as Dr Savepalli Radhakrishnan, Dr Zakir Husain and Dr Shyama Prasad Mookerjee had steered IUB to great esteem that was later renamed as *The Association of Indian Universities (AIU) in 1973*. I am happy to add that today AIU has 683 member universities, that include Central Universities, Institutions of National Importance (IISc, IITs, NITs, SPA, IISERs), National Law Universities, Medical Universities, State Universities, State Technological Universities, Deemed Universities and Self Financed State Private Universities. AIU also has 13 Associate Member Universities from Bhutan, Bangladesh, Republic of Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mauritius, Nepal, Thailand, UAE and UK. Thus Association of Indian Universities represents the collective wisdom of the Vice Chancellors of the country with wider experience and exposure of the global scenario in higher education and research.

We in AIU, are conscious of our responsibility, together with our fellow member universities to revitalize higher education in India so as to make it more relevant to needs of the knowledge era, assure high employability of our graduates, provide enabling environment to foster creativity and innovativeness of our students and faculty, align our R&D to solving the current problems as also to create a better tomorrow on the strength of the advancement of science and technology, promote responsible citizenship and above all making our universities, in true sense, strong pillars of strength for nation building . Towards this end, AIU has an important catalytic role in ushering a new era of accelerated growth of quality and relevance driven transformation of universities in India into knowledge and innovation hubs that shall continue to assure growth with sustainability and lead human society to advance on pathways of human excellence and happiness in plenty.

Today, we are at a stage wherein we celebrate our accomplishments and achievements in the post Independence era especially the Success of our Higher

Education System that produced an army of highly capable persons who rolled out from our universities in India and achieved high national and global eminence, that include quite a few of them from our medical schools and medical universities. It is heartening to see the commitment and dedication with which all universities have been working together towards improving the education system by sharing knowledge on core strengths of each individual universities and striving to upgrade their individual rankings and positions. We all can take great pride in the contributions our scientific community has made in the areas of life sciences, medical science, biomedical engineering and biological sciences and bio-nano-technology.

AIU has been consistently spearheading crucial deliberations and discussions on pressing issues impacting Higher Education Systems in India in our Zonal Meetings and Annual General Body meetings related to Evolution of Higher Education in India since Independence, Contribution of Universities to Skilling, Innovation and Entrepreneurship; Best Practices in ICT: Teaching and Skill Development, Enhancing the Employability of Products of Higher Education in the Eastern Region, and Celebrating Success of Higher Education: Accomplishments and Achievements in Post-independence Era.

AIU, the National Apex body of Indian Universities, is consciously supporting MHRD in its vision to make India a knowledge superpower by equipping its students with the necessary skills and knowledge and to drive the agenda of relevance driven excellence in research and innovations for ushering a new wave of startups and enterprises. In many ways, AIU has been pioneering initiatives that improve the social fabric of the economy and has been applauded across the country for providing innovative platform to academicians, establishing synergy with professional bodies in field of Higher Education and grooming the youths by promoting a culture for innovation and entrepreneurship among them.

Fellow Vice chancellors of the Health Universities, I need not remind you that we are heading the universities of the new knowledge age. A new age, a new era and a new Century that is the Century of Mind and a Century ushering a new hope to wipe out misery, hunger, disease and unemployment from the face of the humanity and create a global society, global citizenship cutting across the barriers of

nationality, barriers of race, religion, colour, caste and economic disparity to create everlasting peace and harmony between people of the world. A great promise awaits us at the dawn of the new age that has already begun to invigorate our minds on the exciting opportunities that lie ahead for the experienced and enlightened faculty and budding medical professionals in our universities to make a profound contribution to the advancement of the frontiers of knowledge of medical sciences and making it possible to create a heaven on earth and happiness all around.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are in the brightest of the times in the march of human civilization on planet Mother Earth when mind boggling advances are taking place on scientific and technological fronts, creating capabilities in man, machines and systems that shall elevate man to levels of divinity, such that it shall allow you to proclaim with conviction "*Ahom Brahmasmi*" ie I am the Brahma, the ultimate reality, the divinity that manifests in this vast creation as was proclaimed by the great Vedic seers who discovered the meaning and purpose of life and secret of nature in the concept of *Poorna*, the eternity of matter and energy. As such, we all should be highly inspired to find a more profound meaning of our engagement in our pursuit of education and research at our Universities in India.

Let me not hesitate to state that the basic purpose of medical science education and research is to serve the people, wipe out their tears, and eradicate their sufferings, eliminate disease and to educate and empower them with wellness give them a life full of bliss and happiness. This requires more than the knowledge and capabilities of modern medical science and health care profession. It is this "privilege to serve and privilege to excel" that should over score on any other consideration when it comes to practicing as medical professionals. We need to create some space in our curriculum to this aspect of humanism so that we succeed in creating medical professionals for whom "Service over self" shall be the mission of life. Similar sentiments have also been echoed by Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General of WHO " WHO's work is about serving people regardless of who they are, poor or rich, displaced or disabled, elderly or the youth. Most importantly, it's about fighting to ensure the health of people as a basic human right".

But then Health is not just fighting the disease as has been voiced by WHO “ Health is defined as **a state of complete physical, mental and social well being and not merely absence of disease or infirmity**”. To this we may add in our context “Spiritual well being” also. Good health confers on a person freedom from illness and the ability to realize one’s physical, mental and spiritual potential. Health is therefore, best understood as the indispensable basis for defining a person’s sense of well being. The health of a nation is judged by the health of its people. It is here in this context we find that despite a commendable progress made in the arena of health care and medical research, our hospitals are as crowded as railway stations, the disease is prevalent and suffering has no end. As such, we can well understand the nexus between the health of our environment, work life and human health. Concurrent actions are required to improve the health of environment, quality of air, water and food and also rediscovering the joy of living a life full of harmony and happiness. Physical and mental fitness with the practice of yoga and meditation along side with creating a spiritual awakening to drastically reduce the mounting trauma and stresses due to our work life shall do wonders.

The prime question is what we do in our curriculum design and in research to promote this concept of holistic health and well being. Though India is cheaper than many advanced countries of the world in respect of medical and health care services, yet the ever escalating cost of medical treatment in India is a matter of great concern to our large populace. Disease does not differentiate between rich and poor, literate or illiterate, able or disabled. As such achieving the goal of affordable health care is something we cannot put on the back burner. May be we are at a highly opportune time in our country to rediscover the value and worth of our traditional knowledge and indigenous herbal medicines that have stood in good deed for millions of years before the advent of the modern medical sciences. But here again we need to pay a much greater attention to the scientific research and drug discovery using our most modern tools and instruments so as to scientifically derive a much greater value from our traditional herbs and local medicines. This calls for a greater investment on R&D in AYUSH.

Given this scenario, AIU felt an imperative need for organizing this *Roundtable of Vice Chancellors of Health Science Universities*, as low healthcare standards in our country are imposing huge economic opportunity cost on our nation.

Malnutrition being rampant here, the state of health of our citizens, women, and children needs due focus and priority. India is getting increasingly burdened with rising non-communicable diseases like cardiovascular diseases, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes, etc which is accounting for nearly 60% of the lead causes of deaths in India. These are causing potential loss in productive lives. If this cause is unattended, the very demographic dividend that is being raved as a boon will be lost as that will reduce India to a unhealthy youth population. As reiterated by our Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhiji, the real wealth of a nation is good health and not gold and silver, hence there is an urgent need to provide well trained healthcare professionals, increase health awareness in the nation, substantially develop and strengthen health infrastructures and initiate immediate reforms for significantly upgrading our medical education standards. While the Government and concerned ministries have already taken positive steps in this direction, it is our responsibility in our universities in India to take up with a sense of urgency reforms in our education and research systems to strengthen the resolve of our government to assure good health for all our people in a foreseeable future.

Towards this end, I would like to also draw the attention of the Vice chancellors of the medical universities towards the dire need to create the vital synergy between education and research, synergy between medical science and ever advancing frontiers of biological sciences and biotechnology, integration of medical science and engineering and promotion of integrative sciences and interdisciplinary education and research. Further modern research in medical and biological sciences being expensive we in India need to increasingly focus of translating our research outcome into patentable IPR so as to succeed in recovering the cost of investment in research. I am indeed very happy to note that ICMR, DBT and DST are generously supporting the growth of quality research in our universities as such it is our responsibility that the investment in research creates “Advantage India” in respect of drug design and discovery and also improving the efficacy of our health care at an affordable cost.

We can not blind ourselves from the fact that a large number of our bright young students are going abroad for higher studies, in fact draining away as much as 100,000 crores annually out of the country, while our entire government

expenditure on education, including higher education, is barely Rs Rs79,685.95 crore for the education sector for financial year 2017-18. Further, of the total outlay, Rs46,356.25 is for the school sector and the rest for higher education.

This puts an added responsibility on us, the fellow Vice Chancellors to create an environment of quality education at par or even better than currently offered by the advanced nations of the world, so as to herald this mad rush for foreign degrees and qualifications at the same time attracting in great numbers foreign students from both the developing as well as developed countries to India for education and research in our universities.

There is a massive rise in the number of students enrolled for higher education in India, which reflects the rising aspirations of our society. But this rise should be well-matched by better infrastructure and financial support to avoid creating heaps of mediocrity in field of higher education. The more our universities imbibe and function on principles of meritocracy, trust and empowerment, the outcome and products of our universities will be acknowledged worldwide and we can move up in league of world class universities.

I am indeed very happy to note that the Government of India is committed to promoting quality research in our universities by attracting brilliant minds to come forwards for research. The recent initiative of the Government of India of creating 2000 research fellowships of Rs Rs 70,000 pm for IITs and IISc is highly welcome, but then let it be extended to high performing government and self financed universities as well in areas of research of high importance to our nation. We need also to significantly increase Post Doctoral Fellowships in our universities in India, especially in our medical universities so as to attract the brilliant minds to continue to focus on cutting edge research of high relevance to advancing the frontiers of medical sciences.

We need also to foster a much greater collaboration and cooperation between universities and universities within as well as out of the country between universities and Industry and corporate and between universities and society to succeed in our quest to achieve the goal of academic and research relevance driven excellence.

At Amity University Gurgaon, where I am currently the Vice Chancellor, though we do not have a medical college, but recognizing the need for synergy between applies sciences, engineering and allied medical disciplines we have our focused attention to vision science and engineering(Optomety), imaging technologies, biomedical engineering, acoustic science and sound engineering (Audiology) and are pursuing frontal research on MDR and Cancer Research, Lipidomics, and advanced structural biology in our Amity Institute of Biotechnology thus preparing a fertile ground for path braking research and development of high relevance to medical science. I am sure a lot must be with you to share with your fellow vice chancellors on the exciting research and innovations happening in your university. Let this roundtable create the desired synergy and spirit of cooperation and collaboration and sharing of best practices among the universities.

Let me finish by taking immense pride in being with you at this historic roundtable and hope that the synergy of minds created at this roundtable shall result in concrete recommendations of high relevance to revitalize medical education and research in our medical universities in India.

I wish the round table conference a grand success and also expect that the deliberations will certainly provide some concrete inputs for the Health Education & Research policy of the country.

Thank you Ladies and Gentlemen.

1. Prof PB Sharma is the President of Association of Indian Universities and Vice Chancellor of Amity University Gurgaon, former professor of IIT delhi and Founder Vice Chancellor of DTU and RGTU.