

# Human Resource in Health – Need for Allied Health Cadres in India...



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The global healthcare system today is growing at a rapid pace owing to the increased demand, expectations of beneficiaries and need for healthcare services. However, in India, there has been little done to estimate and address the need of these services and to measure the competency of healthcare providers. As a result, the Indian healthcare sector is facing an acute shortage of human resources in health.

Moreover, this insufficiency when coupled with several other related factors such as infrastructure and supplies makes the healthcare system incapable of meeting the healthcare needs of the entire population. To combat the problem, it is necessary to augment skilled healthcare workers at all levels of the sector so as to ensure continuous delivery of quality services and to provide improved access to healthcare services.

We all know that the healthcare sector does not comprise only of doctors and the medical staff. There are healthcare professionals or the so-called non-medical staff who contribute to bring the healthcare services to people, families, and communities in a collaborative manner. These professionals from allied health services are very importance for the healthcare services, public and private, to meet its larger goal.

The dramatic changes happening in the healthcare industry today have an equal effect on allied health as well, and thereby these effects will certainly have a direct influence on the ways healthcare services are delivered to individual patients and communities.

## Who Are Allied Health Professionals?

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Allied health professions constitute an important part of the healthcare team, and work to ensure smooth functioning of the healthcare system by providing a wide range of therapeutic, diagnostic, technical, rehabilitative, and direct patient care services. No doubt, the healthcare and other support services provided by the allied health professions are vital for the medical staff to work with and serve the patients better.

The allied health professionals include occupational therapists, medical and clinical laboratory personnel, paramedic, medical assistants, surgical technologists, Orthotists, Prosthetists, Psychotherapists, Rehabilitation Counselors, social workers, and more. They are trained to handle specialized and complementary services to deal with the health problems of the patients within their area of expertise through assessment, diagnosis, or treatment in close collaboration with doctors.

Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) are the support pillars of the healthcare team. They play a critical role in contributing to the delivery of health or related services. They work in interdisciplinary healthcare teams with the medical professionals and specialists to promote recovery and ensure the delivery of quality healthcare services.

## **Need For Allied Health Professionals**

Allied health professionals primarily contribute their expertise in therapeutic, curative, and preventive and promotive, diagnostic and rehabilitative interventions. They constantly aim to promote, treat and/or deal with the physical, mental, psychological, and holistic well-being of the patients. Hence, their need within the industry holds greater significance with respect to their patient accountability and as a diagnostic and clinical service provider.

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The examples below indicate how and why allied health professionals support other health professionals as an inevitable part of the healthcare team are:

## **Patient Care:**

The healthcare industry is to work collaboratively to prevent, identify, evaluate, and treat the diseases, prevent and manage disabilities, and disorders of the patients. The need for allied health practitioners arises to address various aspects of healthcare. AHPs promote a better quality of life for the patients. Allied healthcare professionals assist the medical professionals in early recognition and identification of patient's problems. Their expertise coupled with direct patient care and accountability adds great value to the healthcare team.

## **Clinical Support:**

Allied health professionals assist the medical staff in delivering the clinical support within the wards, outdoor and laboratories. They offer preventive and rehabilitation services to serve the patients. Critical care support in ICUs and hospice facilities are a part of the services offered by allied health professionals. Apart from that, allied health cadres also support the medical team in technical areas to assist the busy medical professionals. For instance, transcriptionists and medical coders help manage critical data within the healthcare industry for seamless patient care. The allied health cadres support the medical staff and contribute in to improve the overall public health outcomes.

## **Social, Psychological, Environmental Well-Being:**

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Allied health professionals function beyond the physical medicine. Among the range of services offered by allied health professionals, a greater focus is on the services that support the wellness of patients and the quality of life. Allied health professionals, help fulfill the cognitive, social, and emotional needs of patients and play an important role in improving quality of life. For instance, social workers in the healthcare sector provide the much required emotional/social support and guidance to the patients and their families by counseling, referring for rehabilitation, medical assistance, and specialized counseling services, if required. Similarly, recreational therapists, who also belong to the AHP group, serve to evaluate patients, especially children, so as to determine the type of recreational activity best suited for them.

## **Shortage of Allied Health Professionals:**

The acute shortage of allied health professionals in India is largely being reflected in the poor health outcomes. This is because the Indian healthcare sector falls short in production capacity as well as in providing quality education and training to empower allied health professionals. There is an uneven distribution of health professionals between urban and rural areas, leading to an imbalance in healthcare service delivery. Among the fastest growing professions in the US, about two thirds are related to health and many of them do not exist in India. There is also a need to identify new emerging needs for allied health professionals and start training to induct them into the system.

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There is hence an inevitable need to fill the skill gaps of the healthcare professionals by providing them with the necessary training and education to improve soft skills and better their core clinical skills. Moreover, the advancements in technology have made it imperative for the allied health professionals to be proficient in information technology-related skills with additional knowledge on digital analysis and computerization of patient records.

It is high time for the nation to augment human resources within the sector for the betterment of healthcare delivery. Since allied health cadres play a critical role in improving the overall healthcare services in both developed and underserved regions, there needs to be no shortage of these professionals to ensure smooth delivery of services.

With the demand for allied health professionals constantly increasing, the government needs to fill the gaps and shortfalls in the sector. It is necessary to bridge the huge shortfall of allied healthcare cadres in the industry through the promotion of skills development schemes and vocational programs that aids and/or promotes the allied healthcare profession. Planned courses and diverse standards of practice will improve the quality of healthcare manifold.

According to a report by WHO, India needs to add 80,000 hospital beds each year for the next five- seven years to meet the increasing healthcare demands. It is estimated that each additional bed has the potential to create 5 direct and 25 indirect jobs. Lot of these indirect jobs would be for Health, Health IT and Hospital managers. What the country requires today, are well-qualified and professionally trained allied health professionals with expertise and specialization to meet the changing health profiles and rising expectations of the population. This has to be dealt with at the earliest to ensure the balanced functioning of the healthcare sector and delivery of services.