

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE AT THE 40TH CONVOCATION OF THE ALL
INDIA INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL SCIENCES**

New Delhi: 16-10-2012

I am very happy to be present at the 40th convocation of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences. This Institute is a tribute to the vision of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur who foresaw the need for an institution that can emerge as the trail blazer for medical education and research in the country. AIIMS is also a living tribute to the faculty, staff and students who have, over the years, worked selflessly to bring the Institute to its present position of pre-eminence. It is due to their efforts that this Institute stands out as a beacon of hope and succour for the thousands who throng its corridors seeking relief from their maladies and sufferings. I am honoured to have been invited to address the Convocation of an Institute with such glowing credentials.

2. Let me begin by congratulating the students and scholars who are receiving their degrees and prizes today. The Convocation marks the fruition of your hard work and your transition from students to professionals, from scholars to scientists. You now don the mantle of disseminators of the knowledge and skills acquired at the institute from your teachers and mentors. While you must rejoice and celebrate your achievements, you must also realize the enormity of

responsibility that has been placed upon you. The baton of knowledge and skills, that you have received and the values you have imbibed must be carried with the same spirit and zeal as has been done by your teachers. This has to be a lifelong commitment and this is the only '*gurudakshina*' your teachers, mentors and your Alma Mater would perhaps expect from you.

3. No other Institute is so intensely watched by government, the Parliament, the media and by the public at large as AIIMS as they all see AIIMS as a symbol of excellence in medical sciences. The country expects the Institute, its faculty and students to live up to this illustrious image. AIIMS must rise to be one of the 10 best medical universities in the world by the year 2020. The target is ambitious but not insurmountable. I charge you—the faculty, the scientists, the scholars, the students and the staff, to focus on this singular goal.

4. Knowledge is the driver of today's world. While we stand today at the cusp of greatness in several fields on the global platform, our energy and innovation thrust in the field of medical sciences is yet to scale the heights. We look upon AIIMS to lead India to the frontiers of innovative solutions in health care, discovering new cures, harnessing existing and emerging technologies for affordable healthcare, and exploring new paradigms for preventing disease and creating wellness. AIIMS should be a power house of biomedical research and

a role model for others. This role is germane to the Institute's identity as a biomedical sciences university—and this places you in an altogether different league. It is good that AIIMS is setting up its second campus at Jhajjar in Haryana. We should develop world class centres of excellence focused not only on traditional specialties but also on cross-cutting themes such as infectious diseases, vaccine development and regenerative sciences. You must step forward and become leaders in the world of medicine. The government will support you in this endeavour in every possible way but the faculty and scientists of AIIMS must show that it can push frontiers of biomedical research and innovation to the highest orbit.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. Health is among the topmost priorities of the Government. Progress in the health sector is key to India's future place of prominence in the world. Nation's productivity depends on the health and well-being of its citizens. Economic growth that does not go hand in hand with reduction in avoidable mortality and ill health is neither sustainable nor desirable.

6. I am deeply concerned about the impoverishing impact of health and medical expenses on the vulnerable sections of our society. It is unacceptable that almost 80% of the expenditure on healthcare by our people is met by personal, out of pocket, payment. I am shocked

to note that as many as 4 crore people of our country plunge into poverty each year due to expenses on medical treatment. Yet, we should remember that the health services for the poor cannot be poor health services. We need to craft a high quality national health system that is used by the poor and the rich alike.

7. Time has come for India to aim at attaining Universal Health Coverage in the next 2 to 3 Plan periods. It is possible today to leverage reasonable amount of resources to make bold and sustained investment in health. I visualize public spending on health rising to 2.5% of the GDP by the end of the Twelfth Plan period.

8. Provision of universal health care is a matter of faith for the Government. For this, the public health system must be greatly expanded and strengthened across the Nation. We need many more nurses, doctors, paramedics and health workers. We need to decentralize planning and implementation of healthcare to the district and sub-district levels. We need to take health services closer to the homes of the families—even a primary health centre is too far by today's standard and need. We need out of the box managerial and administrative reforms in the health departments at the state and central level. We need public health professionals to spearhead public health programs. We need to develop effective models of healthcare for the ever-increasing urban population. The foundation of India's

national health system must be a strong, sensitive and efficient public health system.

9. I call upon all stakeholders to join hands to build a solid consensus for a historic transformation of India's health sector in the coming years.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

10. People must be at heart of advances in health and delivery of healthcare. The uniqueness of AIIMS stems from its being people-centric in its functioning. The Institute's contribution to national programmes including the Integrated Child Development Services, Iodine Deficiency Disease Control program, Reproductive and Child Health, diarrheal disease, health of the elderly, AIDS control and the non communicable diseases is noteworthy. However, the new challenges of the country's health sectors are opportunities for the Institute not only in its zeal for excellence but to contribute towards nation building. Excellence should not be confined to Delhi but must touch the hearts of the millions all over the country who are still struggling for equitable access to quality health care. I urge the Health Ministry, the Indian Council of Medical Research and the Institute to work in unison. Research synergized with field experience should seamlessly flow into the national health programmes. Research must

not only be acclaimed by the academia, but must benefit the public at large.

11. I wish all the graduating students and awardees the very best in their future endeavours. I urge them to live this dream for the nation by dedicating themselves to the service of mankind. You, as we all do, owe it to our great country.

Thank you very much.

JAI HIND!