

## Experts delve into regulatory aspects to various facets of healthcare sector

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**“There is a trade-off between equity and quality of healthcare services”: Augustine Peter, Former Member, CCI**



To celebrate the occasion of World Competition Day, Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS) recently organised a panel discussion on “Regulatory Deficit in Access to Equitable Healthcare” under the broader theme of “prioritising socially sensitive sectors”, in partnership with CUTS Institute for Regulation and Competition (CIRC) and Institute for Studies in Industrial Development (ISID), in New Delhi.

The event was marked by launching the 11th edition of the India Competition and Regulation Report (ICRR) on the “Regulatory Deficit in Access to Equitable Healthcare”, which delves into the regulatory aspects to various facets of the healthcare sector.

In her opening remarks, Kiran N Meetarbhan, Former CEO of the Mauritius Competition Authority and Director, CUTS International, highlighted that a nation’s economic prosperity is intricately linked to the well-being of its citizens which is marked by their health status, a principle underscored in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Chairing the panel, Nagesh Kumar, Director, ISID, underscored the imperative of addressing the deficiencies within our healthcare system that were starkly revealed during the pandemic. While India successfully asserted its position in the global market by developing vaccines, there remains a considerable journey ahead to further advance and fortify its capabilities in this domain, ensuring readiness to confront any prospective health crises.

Addressing the conference, Augustine Peter, head of AP Regulatory Law Practice and former Member of CCI, emphasised the role of competition enforcement in improving healthcare access in India. He underscored the necessity of examining the availability, affordability, and accessibility of the healthcare system in a dualistic way, particularly for the underprivileged, to progress toward a welfare state. He highlighted the significance of regulations in efficiently utilising existing resources to minimise depletion and enhance consumer benefits within the healthcare sector.

According to him, "There is a trade-off between equity and quality of healthcare services. Much of the country's GDP is focused towards the Indian tertiary healthcare system rather than strengthening India's primary healthcare system."

Arpita Mukherjee, Professor, Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, ICRIER pointed out that India lacks holistic recognition and accreditation of medical services and medical human resources when compared to other developed countries in the world.

According to her, "India has tremendous potential for medical tourism but we failed to use important platforms like G-20 for strengthening our healthcare diplomacy."

Ayona Bhattacharjee, Assistant Professor, International Management Institute highlighted India's pharma vision which is aimed to be achieved by 2024, giving a new dimension to the global market and attracting higher investments in the Indian healthcare sector, as we aim towards shifting from volumes to value-based healthcare services.

In the panel, Associate Professor Reji K Joseph of ISID discussed reducing India's dependence on imported active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) from countries like China. He stressed the importance of leveraging India's API industry and the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme to achieve this objective. Professor Joseph underscored the significant contribution of private sector enterprises in India's public healthcare system, highlighting that SMEs produce 80% of the country's APIs.

According to Dr Priyanka Bajaj, Manager-Health and Innovation, PATH "Regulations are not just a barrier but also one of the key drivers to achieve Universal Health Coverage in India."

Navneet Sharma, Director General of CIRC, addressed the issue of persistent market dominance, "sticky market" posing a significant threat to the Indian healthcare system in the future.

In conclusion, Ujjwal Kumar, Associate Director, CUTS-CCIER, flagged that competition enforcement alone is not sufficient and that a coordinated effort by the government, sector regulators and competition authority are needed to solve competition concerns in the pharmaceutical and healthcare sector.