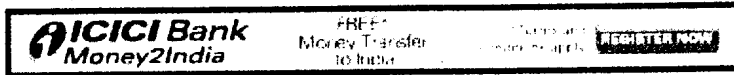


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Tamil Nadu - Coimbatore

Institutional deliveries on the rise in PHCs

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“Improvements to centres under National Rural Health Mission, a major reason”

COIMBATORE: Improvements to primary health centres (PHCs) and health sub-centres in the rural areas are encouraging more institutional deliveries. This will help in bringing down maternal mortality rate and infant mortality rate, according to Deputy Director of Health Services R.T. Porkai Pandian.

Funds from the Union Government’s National Rural Health Mission have helped in improving the conditions at the PHCs and the sub centres. “We have even installed televisions in the PHCs and even provided each of them with a digital video disc player. There is stress on providing good drinking water. So, we have provided the centres with water purifiers,” says Dr. Porkai Pandian.

The Deputy Director says that even doctors are going to the villages and educating pregnant mothers on the advantages of delivery at the centres. The entire exercise is monitored by the District Health Society for which the District Collector is the Chairman and the Deputy Director the Member-Secretary. Under this programme, each PHC gets Rs.25,000 a year to meet any requirement. “This is an untied fund as it is not given for any specific purpose such as buying equipment or building a structure,” he says. Besides, Rs.50,000 is provided every year towards annual maintenance contract.

A Patient Welfare Society has been formed in each health centre. The society also gets Rs.50,000 a year and this can be spent on providing any facility for the patients. The Block Development Officer is the chairman of the society.

Another effort at increasing the institutional delivery is the deployment of 469 village health nurses across the district. “We have 469 health sub-centres (each PHC has five to seven sub-centres). These nurses call on pregnant mothers in the villages and tell them about safe deliveries in the health centres,” Dr. Porkai Pandian explains.

The government has provided cellular phones to all the nurses. The phone numbers are mentioned on the ante-natal cards issued to the pregnant women so that the nurses can be called to the house to check if the time of delivery has indeed come. As for the upkeep of

sub-centres, the Deputy Director says that Rs.10,000 is provided to them every year to ensure facilities for the patients.

The government has also introduced the concept of 24-hour healthcare delivery system in the PHCs. The Deputy Director says 23 of the 68 PHCs in the district have this system, with focus on maternity and child health.

Dr. Porkai Pandian says that these initiatives are helping in building public faith in the PHCs. "They do not have the tag of locked health care centres anymore. The rising cases of institutional deliveries have ensured this. At least 15 to 18 PHCs look as good as private centres and handle nearly 15 deliveries a month."

Pregnant women below the poverty line get Rs.6,000 from the government under the Muthulakshmi Reddiar Maternity Assistance Scheme. While Rs.3,000 is given in the ante-natal stage, the balance is given at the PHC soon after the delivery.

This assistance too has improved the rate of institutional deliveries, says the health official. As sum of Rs.5.61 crore was given to 15,168 beneficiaries in 2006-07 and over Rs.9 crore to 16,401 beneficiaries (so far) for 2007-2008.