

Speech of Health Minister for the Inauguration of the CME and Workshop on Regions Blocks for Pain Management

(Dated 6.30 pm)

1. It gives me immense pleasure to inaugurate the CWRPM 2009 organized by the Department of Anesthesiology and City Branch of ISA. In my extensive travels as Health Minister to a number of District Hospitals and Community Health Centers in Rajasthan, I have been confronted with the challenge of a dire shortage of anesthetists in the State. I recognize that the single most important cause for inadequacy of emergency care in government hospitals particularly in rural areas is the severe shortage of anesthetists. Large numbers of operation theaters at Community Health Centers are lying unutilized due to shortages of skilled workforce in anesthesia. In this backdrop, to meet 200 Anesthetists together, this evening, is indeed a delightful occasion.

2. SMS Medical Hospital performs 1.5 lacs operations per annum. The success of surgeries is an important element in the advancement of anesthesia. The anesthesiologists are important players in the management of critical care units, cardio-pulmonary resuscitation, emergency services and pain management. Pain Medicine brings them to the front line of medical specialization. Patients demand for pain relief has to be effectively addressed, for unrelieved pain has major negative effects. I am glad to learn that the Department of Anesthesiology managed pain relief clinic, focuses on clinical diagnosis, and treatment of acute and chronic pain like sciatica, frozen shoulder, low back pain and cancer pain. I am also informed that many patients are treated by different regional nerve blocks and other non pharmacological methods. I am also glad to know that the anesthetists from

the Tata Memorial Hospital and Bombay Hospital and GTB Hospital New Delhi would be delivering lectures on various techniques and will demonstrate on regional blocks in cancer patients.

3. Let me turn to the larger challenge of coping with shortages of anesthetists in the State. The National Rural Health Mission envisaged operationalization of 237 Community Health Centers as First Referral Units in the State by 2008-09. We need to reach 367 First Referral Units by end 2010-11. Faced with an acute shortage of surgeons and anesthetists, the State could operationalize only 55 CHCs as First Referral Units till date. On the advice of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, a strategy of providing multi skills has been adopted by the State.

4. Government has been providing multi-skills to medical officers through four and half month courses at SMS Medical College and other 6 Medical Colleges in the State. However our capacity to train large numbers remains limited. With a capacity to train 72 medical officers/ annum it is going to take a long time to overcome the shortages of 381 skilled anesthetists in Rajasthan. Over the past 3 years, the State has trained 89 Medical officers as anesthetists. However, only a few of them have started working as anesthetists at CHCs. The rest continue to work at PHCs or suffer from a lack of confidence to perform as anesthetists. I have advised my departments, to contact other medical colleges of the country to meet our training needs so that additional anesthetists are available within the State. I have also advised them and the Head of Department of Anesthesia of SMS Medical College to personally ascertain from each of them, the reasons for their continuation as non-performing anesthetists after the multi skills

trainings. I would be interested in closely monitoring the impact of this intervention in the coming months.

5. Perhaps a longer term measure could be to upgrade the anesthesiology departments in medical colleges into Institutes of Anesthesiology so that the critical gaps in anesthetists across the State can be better addressed. Clearly more steps need to be taken to start more courses in anesthesia to overcome the shortage of anesthetists. Policy initiatives in this regard would be pursued in the coming months.

6. Let me conclude by wishing this Conference all success with the expectation that the recommendations and conclusions will enable young anesthetists with higher skill base for treating pain patients. Thank You.