



National Board of Examination - Journal of Medical Sciences
Volume 1, Issue 7, Pages 398–403, July 2023
DOI 10.61770/NBEJMS.2023.v01.i07.001

EDITORIAL

Present, Past and Future of 'Family Medicine' Practice in India

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Accepted: 04-July-2023 / Published Online: 18-July-2023

There is an ever-increasing recognition of the importance of primary healthcare and the need for skilled family physicians in the Indian healthcare system. National Board of Examination in Medical Sciences (NBEMS) offers a post graduate Diplomate of the National Board (DNB) course in Family Medicine. Such a course would help bridge the gap between the demand for primary healthcare services and the availability of adequately trained family physicians. The delivery of holistic treatment and preventive medicine strongly counters

the unnecessary burden on limited tertiary hospitals [1].

The DNB course in Family Medicine is focused to provide specialized training to medical graduates in comprehensive and continuing care for individuals and families. It would focus on equipping doctors with the necessary skills to address a wide range of medical conditions, preventive care, and health promotion. The course would emphasize the principles of holistic and patient-centered care, continuity of care, and community orientation.

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The concept of Family Medicine

Primary Healthcare

Family medicine serves as the first point of contact for individuals seeking medical care. Family physicians are trained to diagnose and treat a wide range of common illnesses and injuries. They are equipped to handle various medical conditions and offer preventive services such as vaccinations, health check-ups, and screening tests.

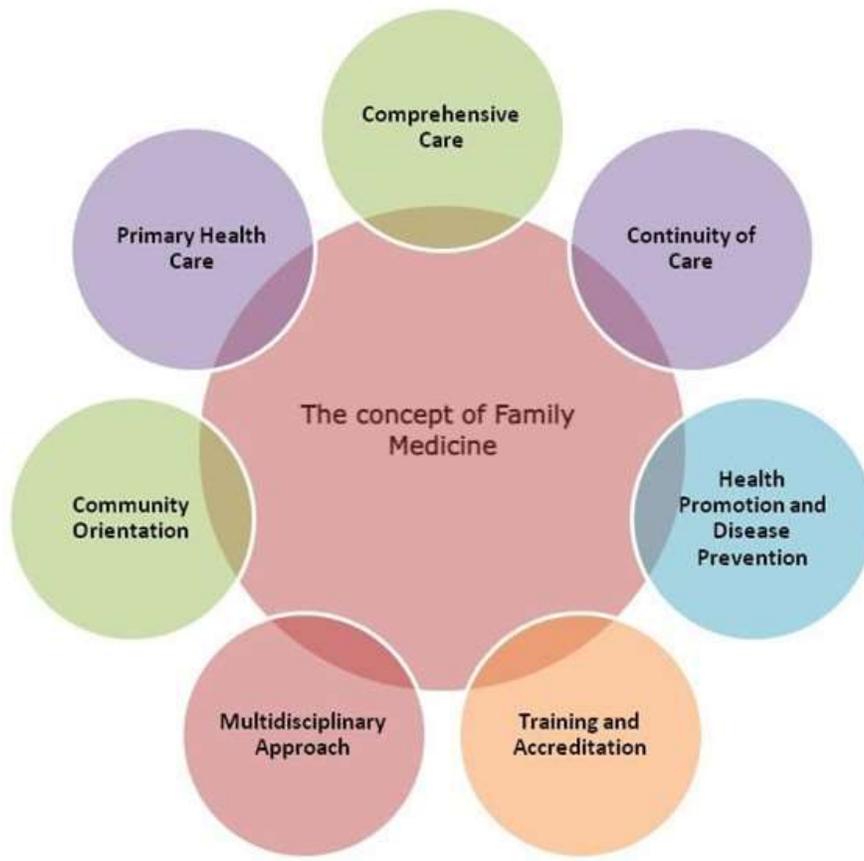
Continuity of Care

Family physicians in India emphasize building long-term relationships with their patients. They provide continuous care by managing chronic conditions, monitoring

progress, and coordinating care with specialists when necessary. This continuity helps in better understanding the patient's health history, family dynamics, and individual needs.

Comprehensive Care

Family medicine aims to provide comprehensive care to patients of all ages and genders. Family physicians are trained in managing a broad spectrum of medical conditions across different organ systems. They address acute illnesses, chronic diseases, mental health concerns, and promote overall well-being.



Health Promotion and Disease Prevention

Family physicians play a crucial role in promoting health and preventing diseases. They provide counseling on lifestyle modifications, healthy eating habits, physical activity, and stress management. They also offer preventive services such as immunizations, screenings for various diseases, and early detection of risk factors.

Community Orientation

Family medicine in India recognizes the importance of community-oriented healthcare. Family physicians often work in primary healthcare centers, community health clinics, and private practices. They understand the local health needs, socioeconomic factors, and cultural influences that impact the health of individuals and families.

Multidisciplinary Approach

Family physicians collaborate with other healthcare professionals to ensure comprehensive care. They work closely with specialists, nurses, pharmacists, and allied health professionals to provide a holistic approach to healthcare delivery. This interdisciplinary collaboration enhances patient outcomes and promotes efficient healthcare utilization.

Training and Accreditation

In India, family medicine is gaining recognition as a distinct medical specialty. Several medical institutions and universities offer postgraduate programs in family medicine, providing specialized training to medical graduates. The National Medical Council (NMC) has also established

guidelines and accreditation processes for family medicine training programs.

Family Medicine–Global Scenario

Family medicine in India shares many similarities with its counterparts around the world, as the principles and goals of providing comprehensive and primary healthcare remain consistent. However, there are also some notable differences influenced by factors such as healthcare systems, cultural contexts, and educational frameworks. In many countries, family medicine is recognized as a distinct medical specialty, with dedicated training programs and board certifications. This recognition allows family physicians to have a defined career path within the healthcare system. In India, while family medicine is gaining recognition, it is still in the process of being established as an independent specialty with standardized training and accreditation.

The healthcare systems across the world vary, and family medicine adapts to the specific needs of each country. In some countries, like the United States, family physicians often work in private practices, while in others, like the United Kingdom, they are integrated into the public healthcare system. In India, family physicians work in various settings, including private practices, primary healthcare centers, and community health clinics. The scope of practice for family physicians may vary across countries due to variations in healthcare systems and regulations. In some countries, family physicians are the primary healthcare providers, managing a wide range of medical conditions, performing minor procedures, and coordinating care with specialists. In

India, family physicians generally provide primary healthcare services, but the scope of practice may depend on the specific setting and the healthcare resources available.

Cultural factors can influence the practice of family medicine. In countries like India, where family and community play a significant role in healthcare decision-making, family physicians may need to consider the cultural beliefs, preferences, and dynamics of the patients and their families. This cultural context can impact the approach to healthcare delivery and patient management.

The training and education of family physicians can vary across different countries. Some countries have well-established residency programs and postgraduate courses specifically in family medicine. This program focuses on equipping physicians with the skills necessary for comprehensive and primary care. In India, while postgraduate programs in family medicine are being developed, the training pathways and standards are still evolving. Family medicine research and evidence-based practice contribute to the development and improvement of healthcare services. The focus and extent of research in family medicine may vary between countries. In countries with well-established family medicine programs, research is often conducted to address the specific healthcare needs and challenges of the population.

Initiative taken by the Govt. of India to promote and strengthen Family Medicine

The Government of India has taken several initiatives to promote family medicine and strengthen primary healthcare

services in the country. Such as the following:

National Health Policy 2017

The National Health Policy emphasizes the need for strengthening primary healthcare services and promoting family medicine. It recognizes family medicine as a critical component of the healthcare system and highlights the importance of training and capacity building in this field.

National Health Mission (NHM)

The NHM, aims to provide accessible, affordable, and quality healthcare to all citizens, with a focus on rural and underserved areas. Under the NHM, initiatives have been taken to improve primary healthcare services, including the establishment of Primary Health Centers (PHCs) and Community Health Centers (CHCs) staffed by family physicians and other healthcare professionals.

National Board of Examinations (NBE)

The NBE, under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, is responsible for postgraduate medical education and training. It has been involved in the development of postgraduate programs in family medicine, such as the Diplomate of National Board (DNB) course in Family Medicine.

Collaboration with International Organizations

The government has collaborated with international organizations, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA), to promote family medicine.

These collaborations aim to enhance training programs, share best practices, and

strengthen the role of family physicians in primary healthcare delivery.



Skill Development Programs

The government has launched skill development programs to enhance the capabilities of healthcare professionals, including family physicians. These programs focus on improving clinical skills, diagnostic abilities, and management of common medical conditions encountered in primary care settings.

The future of Family Medicine in India

The future of the family medicine course in India holds great potential for growth and development. While the field of family medicine is still in the process of gaining recognition and standardization in India, there are several factors that indicate a positive outlook for its future. As India continues to face healthcare challenges, there

is a growing recognition of the importance of primary healthcare in addressing the healthcare needs of the population. Family medicine, with its focus on comprehensive and primary care, is well-suited to meet this demand. The Government of India has demonstrated its commitment to strengthening primary healthcare services and promoting family medicine through various initiatives. These initiatives include the National Health Policy, the National Health Mission, and collaborations with international organizations. Continued government support is likely to drive the development of family medicine in India.

Organizations like the IMA and AFPI have been actively advocating for the recognition and establishment of family medicine as a specialty in India. Their efforts,

along with the growing awareness among healthcare professionals and the public, are likely to contribute to the future growth of family medicine.

Postgraduate training programs in family medicine, such as the Diplomate of National Board (DNB) course in Family Medicine, are being developed and implemented in India. This program aims to provide specialized training to medical graduates and equip them with the necessary skills to practice family medicine effectively. Collaboration with international organizations and sharing of best practices in family medicine can contribute to the growth and development of the field in India. Learning from experiences and successful models from other countries can help in shaping the future direction of family medicine education, training, and practice in India. The development of a robust, research and evidence base, specific to family medicine in India can further support its growth. Research studies focusing on the effectiveness and outcomes of family medicine practice can provide valuable insights and guide policy decisions.

Family medicine, also known as general practice, is a medical specialty that focuses on comprehensive healthcare for individuals and families. In India, the concept

of family medicine has gained recognition and importance due to its ability to provide primary healthcare services, preventive care, and continuity of care. Family medicine in India revolves around the principles of a holistic and patient-centered approach to healthcare

While the future of family medicine in India looks promising, it will require sustained efforts from all stakeholders, including healthcare professionals, educational institutions, regulatory bodies, and policymakers. Continued advocacy, standardization of training programs, and integration of family medicine into the healthcare system will be crucial in shaping the future landscape of family medicine in India.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declares that they do not have conflict of interest.

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