

LONG WAIT OFFICIALS RECEIVE SEVERAL COMPLAINTS ABOUT CHAOS AT PHARMACIES, FIND THAT STAFF MEMBERS WERE SENT TO OTHER DEPTS Return pharmacists to drug stores, end queues: Govt

PRITHA CHATTERJEE
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DURING the AAP government's 49-day rule in Delhi, patients had made several complaints to the Delhi government's Health department on problems they faced in hospitals. A large number of complaints were regarding long queues and "chaos" at pharmacy stores in hospitals. After setting up a committee to look into these complaints, the Delhi government's Health department has zeroed in on a "unique" reason for the problem, which left officials surprised.

Sources said that it had "emerged" that for years phar-

macists were being delegated to administrative duties and other jobs in most hospitals, due to a shortage of staff, leaving pharmacy stores in many hospitals largely unattended. According to an order issued by the Health Secretary to all hospitals, medical superintendents had been instructed to ensure that pharmacists are returned to their duties in pharmacy stores with "immediate effect", at least during the out patient department (OPD) hours.

An official from the department said, "While going through these complaints that had poured in during the previous government, we saw that a majority of

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A HEALTH DEPT OFFICIAL

them pertained to long waiting hours in drug stores, and serpentine queues that patients had to

endure. Many said they had to wait longer to get their prescribed medicines than to see a doctor. In all our cadres, we are most short of specialist doctors, and if patients could still get seen by a doctor, such mismanagement at the pharmacy made no sense."

He said many patients had also said they did not get the prescribed drugs since the stores were closed by the time they reached the counter.

"We started conducting discussions with some hospital authorities to review the staff strength in pharmacies and that's when we got this surprise. It had become an unwritten rule in hos-

pitals to depute pharmacists elsewhere in the hospital and put either junior staff at the pharmacy counters or allow them to function with one pharmacist, leaving other counters unattended," he said.

Sources said after a review meeting conducted later with hospital authorities, officials learnt that pharmacists had been deputed on human resource work, monitoring hospital security, mortuary work, managing sanitation, hospital stores, supplies and other areas, "basically every other area besides the pharmacy", he said.

"This was thought to be some resource optimisation method

since pharmacists are trained in dealing with medical stores, they were being deputed to other administrative duties. So, we had the staff but the counters at drug stores were left empty," an official said.

The Health department will now be conducting a survey in hospitals to identify if other staff members had been similarly "displaced from their respective duties".

"We will also be conducting a review of other hospital functioning areas to ensure that dedicated staff members are being utilised in their areas of specialisation first, and then in other areas if needed," he said.

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