

Following is the full text of the speech –

“Sisters and brothers,

I am very pleased to be here with you on the first Graduation Day of ESIC Medical College, Faridabad. It is a rejuvenating experience for me to be a part of this Graduation Day ceremony because I see all around me the future of India here. As we know, youth represent our great nation’s future and hold the key to its progress. Looking at these young faces brimming with hope, enthusiasm and optimism, gives me great joy.

I have been informed that the Employees State Insurance Corporation under the Ministry of Labour and Employment is presently running a network of six medical colleges at Faridabad, Sanath Nagar (Hyderabad in Telangana), K.K. Nagar (Chennai in Tamil Nadu), Rajaji Nagar (Bengaluru in Karnataka) and Joka in West Bengal. Moreover, two more Medical Colleges are coming up at Alwar in Rajasthan and Bihta, near Patna in Bihar. Besides, six Post Graduate Institutes of Medical Sciences & Research (PGIMSRs), two dental colleges, two nursing colleges & one Para Medical Institute are also being run by ESIC. All this points to a pioneering, much-needed initiative in healthcare. Further, it is heartening to know that many seats in these institutions are reserved for the wards of Insured Workers who belong to lower strata of society.

I am told that this state-of-the-art ESIC Medical College Faridabad started functioning in 2015 and like many of ESIC institutions, it has also been contributing to Covid-19 care by way of testing, treatment and is now a part of the massive ongoing vaccination drive.

Dear students,

Graduating is a memorable day in the life of any student. It marks the culmination of all your years of hard work and learning. As medical graduates, you are now ready to put into practice all that you have learned over the years. Remember that service should underpin the core of your efforts in the years to come. I have always believed that if you serve humanity with a spirit of selfless dedication, you will derive boundless satisfaction. You will experience this for yourself once you devote yourself to the cause of serving your fellow human beings as doctors or medical professionals. All of you belong to one of the noblest professions known to man. The path you have chosen demands compassion and adherence to a high level of values and ethics. Do not ever compromise on them.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused sickness and death on a global scale, and it is at such a testing time that your generation is stepping out into a world which faces more complex challenges than any generation of doctors in decades, or perhaps, centuries. As soldiers on the front lines of the pandemic, you will play a critical role in this fight against novel coronavirus. With the largest vaccination drive in the world against Covid-19 currently underway in India, the worst phase of this unprecedented health crisis appears to be over. However, we must continue to be vigilant and take all the necessary precautions, individually and collectively, till we stamp out the threat posed by the microscopic organism decisively.

Resilience, research and reinvention helped India become a torch-bearer in contributing to global solutions during this unprecedented pandemic. Our doctors, scientists and policymakers took the challenge of battling this pandemic effectively. With timely and decisive measures we could contain the spread of this virus. I salute the entire medical fraternity from doctors to nurses, para-medical staff and sanitary workers, technicians and ASHA workers in villages, who, as Team India came together as one to fight the pandemic. From PPE kits to surgical gloves and face masks to ventilators and vaccines, our industry ramped up the manufacture of all essential items. Today, not only are we able to meet our domestic demand of PPEs, for

example, but are also exporting to other countries. The untiring efforts and ingenuity of our researchers and scientists need to be applauded.

Dear students,

Along with combating this pandemic, we have to pay our attention to other pressing challenges on the health front.

We are witnessing a disturbing trend of rapid increase in Non-Communicable Diseases. This year's Economic Survey states about 65% of deaths in India are now caused by non-communicable diseases (NCDs). This is a cause for concern. As young medical professionals, I urge upon all of you to not only adopt a healthy and balanced lifestyle, but motivate others. There has to be a concerted effort by all stakeholders to arrest the trend of growing NCDs. I would like to suggest to ESIC to consider setting up of exclusive NCD clinics in urban areas especially to combat the problem of NCDs.

Dear youngsters, each one of you should take out some time once a week or fortnight to visit a nearby slum or a school to create awareness among the people on the issue of NCDs. Counsel these people on the need to introduce lifestyle changes such as taking to physical exercise, consuming a nutritious diet and practising yoga and meditation, among other things, all of which can curb the incidence of NCDs.

The other significant health challenges that need to be addressed include low doctor-patient ratio, rising out-of-pocket expenditure, shortage of medical colleges, inadequate infrastructure in rural areas, and low adoption of health insurance, among others.

Sisters and brothers,

Medical debt is a major cause of poverty in India. Many a time, high out-of-pocket expenditure on health has pushed families into poverty. World Bank data indicates that out-of-pocket expenditure forms over 62 per cent of current health expenditure in India against a world average of 18.12%. Therefore, it is imperative to ensure quality healthcare for all at affordable rates.

In this regard, I am happy to note that ESIS is India's largest social security program covering roughly 10% of India's population. This safety net lies at the core of our age-old philosophy of share-and-care. Every worker who earns up to Rs. 21,000 per month in establishments having 10 or more employees is eligible. The scheme currently has close to 3.5 crore insured persons and a total of 13.3 crore beneficiaries who get a variety of benefits relating to medical, disablement and maternity. These statistics reflect the scope and extent of the sweeping safety net provided by the Government.

However, I must say that despite its vast coverage and size, there is still scope for improvement to ensure better customer experience, grievance redress, and improved health outcomes. I am happy that the Ministry of Labour and Employment has rightfully initiated major reforms in ESIC to ensure safety, security and health of every worker.

I am happy to know that ESIC has entered into a partnership with National Health Authority (NHA), which is running Ayushman Bharat. This will create an ecosystem to facilitate the beneficiaries of ESI Scheme of selected districts to access services at Ayushman Bharat empanelled hospitals. Also, ESI Corporation shall be able to provide medical services to PMJAY beneficiaries through its underutilized Hospitals. This will ensure synergy among these schemes for better health outcomes.

I also appreciate ESCI's initiative, in recent years, to provide health services to people other than its insured persons by granting approval to open its underutilized hospitals to the general public on nominal user charge basis.

Dear youngsters,

It is a matter of satisfaction that over the past few decades, India has emerged as an attractive medical tourism hub in the region. Our nation is witnessing a huge footfall of foreign visitors on medical visas. Today, many medical centres with state-of-the-art facilities and highly skilled professionals are offering latest treatment protocols and procedures at lesser rates when compared to developed countries.

As you move ahead in your career, always remember the motto of service and to uphold values. You should never deviate from the righteous path. Remember to lend a human touch while treating your patients at all times.

Dear friends,

A lighted lamp which is the logo of ESIC truly symbolizes the spirit of your life. In your professional life, wherever you go, always spread light and optimism and help those in distress.

With these words, I once again congratulate all the graduating doctors here, their parents, the faculty of ESIC Medical College, Faridabad on this august occasion of the First Graduation Day ceremony and wish you all the best in all your future ventures. I also thank the Union Labour Minister for inviting me to his function.

Thank You

Jai Hind!