

Telecom-like plans for diabetics

■ Hospital chains woo patients with subscription plans

Soma Das
New Delhi, Jan 4

IN the not-too-distant future, diabetics in urban India could be discussing 'subscription plans', 'top-ups & value-added services' and 'need for portability' while corporate hospitals haggle over 'subscriber base', 'churn rate' and 'average revenue per diabetic'.

Aiming to build a loyal

customer base among India's 50-million-plus diabetics, hospital chains like Apollo Hospitals, Fortis Healthcare and Max Healthcare are broadly emulating the telecom model, formulating annual, six-monthly and quarterly plans to manage this metabolic disorder.

Apollo, Fortis and Max are in different stages of building and scaling up chains of specialised clin-

ics positioned as one-stop solution providers for diabetics. The clinics encourage diabetics to sign up for long-term plans like annual packages which will include a fixed number of visits and tests priced at ₹3,500-25,000.

The feasibility of such a model emerges from the need for continuous management for this lifestyle disorder unlike the conven-

tional model which entails a patient paying a need-based visit to a doctor. The disease is rapidly spreading in India, with the diabetic population projected to touch 80 million by 2030.

Apollo, which pioneered 'sugar clinics' in 2008, has already enrolled 10,000 diabetics. It is targeting 100 such clinics by March and 100,000 subscribers this year.

■ **Continued on Page 2**

Sweet deals for diabetics

“Depending on the chosen package, the patient receives select periodical investigations and consultations with our doctors, counsellors and dieticians. We have also created an online ecosystem for those who opt for our plans. A round-the-clock call centre has been set up for diabetic subscribers as per the entitlement of their package. When situation demands, it also escalates the call to doctors,” said Ashish Pati, head of the sugar clinic initiative at Apollo.

He added that access to a dedicated website which customises health records of enrolled diabetics is part of the Apollo offering.

Similar plans are afoot at Max and Fortis, which let diabetics seek 10 consultations through text messages as part of their package. The healthcare providers are looking to monitor sugar levels of enrolled patients through an SMS-based service and 24X7 helplines.

A holistic approach to combat diabetes has prompted hospital groups to plan diabetes malls which stock goodies and utilities targeted at those suffering the lifestyle disorder.

“We have planned a hub-and-spoke model for diabetics in NCR, with one main centre with world-class research facilities and five neighbourhood specialised diabetes clinics. To address the multi-system disorder, our main centre will house multi-specialty facilities to cater to renal care, foot care, ophthalmological and obesity-related problems under one roof. It will also provide a great retail experience for diabetics who can shop for diabetic appliances such as glucometers, foot care creams, footwear, sugar-free chocolates and recipe books specially for diabetics,” said Anoop Misra who heads the diabetes department at Fortis.

Max has a similar dedicated retail outlet for diabetes at Gurgaon as part of its diabetes clinic. Both Fortis and Max are drawing up plans to expand diabetes clinics in phases and enter other cities.

“In case of diabetes, when we invest \$1 in management, we are saving over \$2. We are successfully improving measurable clinical outcomes of diabetics who have enrolled. Through our long-term diabetes management plans, we are fulfilling a serious need gap,” says Sujeet Jha, head of diabetes, Max Healthcare.

While the World Health Organization predicts that India will lose around \$236.6 billion of national income to diabetes and cardiovascular disease between 2005 and 2015, another industry forecast estimates that by 2030, \$30 billion would be required to manage the magnitude of the disease burden created by diabetes and related complications.