

# ‘Gorakhpur can become hub of medical tourism’

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**Gorakhpur:** Until a decade ago, Gorakhpur was infamous for the annual deaths of children from encephalitis. But now it is performing better than entire Uttar Pradesh on various parameters of medical health-care system and is in the position to become the hub for medical tourism. This was the opinion of the medical experts during a panel discussion on the growth story of Gorakhpur.

Dr Mahima Mittal, dean (academics) and HoD paediatrics, AIIMS Gorakhpur, said, “Back in 2008, 70% of minor patients coming to BRD Medical College in Gorakhpur were suffering from encephalitis and over 80% among them came to the hospital in critical condition. Our resources were overwhelmed, no matter how many beds or human resources were poured in, we never met the demand against the inflow of patients.”

“In 2017, a huge change came in the ecosystem of the medical healthcare system because of the political will. The CM put focus on bringing down the number of encephalitis deaths to zero. CM Yogi Adityanath strengthened the peripheral health services which was crucial in the fight against the epidemic,” she said.

Under Dastak programme, ASHA workers started tracking fever cases in every village, following which patients were taken into multiple tier system—first suspected cases were sent to PHCs and CHCs, while serious cases were sent to BRD medical college or district hospital. The ambulance fleet was increased. In the hospital, 500 beds were dedicated for encephalitis patients and treatment was free. Institutes like Vector Control Research Centre Puducherry got involved, community studies, surveys helped doctors of Gorakhpur to treat 60 % of the pa-



Right to left: Dr Mahima Mittal from AIIMS Gorakhpur, Dr Sanjeev Bagai, chairperson Nephron Clinic, moderator Richa Anirudh, Dr Rajnikant Srivastava, ex-director ICMR-RCMR Gorakhpur and Amit Mehrota from UNICEF UP

tients. “The strengthening of infrastructure from the grassroots decreased the number of critically ill patients. There were years when 3,000 patients used to be admitted in hospital for encephalitis, today due to effective programs around 250 patients are admitted and treated. Every death caused by encephalitis is audited. It was the encephalitis which brought AIIMS to Gorakhpur,” said Dr Mittal.

Supporting her argument, Dr Sanjeev Bagai, chairperson, Nephron Clinic and a Padma Shri awardee, said, “Gorakhpur is geographically located in such an area where a neighbouring country is 100km away while Bihar border is adjacent to the district. Gorakhpur indeed can become a medical tourism hub.”

Dr Rajnikant Srivastava, former director of ICMR-RCMR Gorakhpur, said, “In 2015, there were 5,000 cases of encephalitis out of whom 1,300 died. But following political will to curb the deaths, Gorakhpur got country’s second mobile biosafety level 3 after Pune. During Covid-19, Gorakhpur handled over 10 lakh RT-PCR tests.”

Amit Mehrota, programme manager, UNICEF UP, said, “By at least 25%, Gorakhpur has performed better than Uttar Pradesh in terms of infrastructure development, especially in rural areas from grassroots level with programmes like Dastak.”