

The missing cancer and palliative care in displaced community in north-east India

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Introduction

Cancer is a chronic illness needing long treatment. This includes late toxicity management in case of cure and palliative care if cure is a distant possibility. Northeast part of India shares international border with Bangladesh and both sides had witnessed geopolitical uncertainty since India's independence in 1947. Unrest and military rule in East Pakistan made the citizens to flee to India which continued even after the creation of the new country Bangladesh in 1971. However, the poor migrants are not eligible under the public health scheme due to lack of proof of citizenship. The study objective is to bring out the cause and issue of missing cancer care in displaced community and find possible mitigation strategies. This is a prospective analytical study evaluating health schemes and law of the land.

Methods

We have analyzed the public health scheme and issues of migrants in Northeast India after observing discontinuity in care. Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY) is a national public health insurance scheme of the Government of India that aims to provide free access to health insurance coverage for low-income earners in the country. The scheme is applicable to Indian citizens. In 2019 Government of India passed the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) to provide Indian citizenship to the illegal migrants who entered India on or before 31st December 2014. However, the exercise to identify migrants as per the Act is a tedious process and not yet over.

Results

Until the exercise of granting citizenship under the Citizenship Amendment Act is done, the poor migrants who have no proof of citizenship cannot take benefit under AB PM-JAY scheme. Unfortunately, some internally displaced Indian citizens are lacking proof of citizenship and many of them are suffering from chronic illnesses and cancer, however neither afford to pay for treatment nor eligible to get free treatment under AB PM-JAY scheme.

Conclusion

Northeast India migrant issue is a special situation where poor migrants from other country and some displaced poor Indians are not eligible to get cancer care under public health insurance scheme. The Citizenship Amendment Act provides a solution by granting citizenship. However, the tedious process is taking long time and no solution being offered in the interim period.