

# Hospitals seek clarity on free-bed proposal

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Calcutta: The association of private hospitals in Calcutta will seek time from the state's new health minister to discuss the free-bed proposal, private healthcare providers decided at a meeting on Friday.

On Thursday, health minister Sharadwat Mukherjee asked private hospitals that received land and/or other facilities from the state to provide free treatment to 10% of indoor patients and 20% to those coming to outpatient departments.

Several private hospitals that did not attend Thursday's meeting at Swasthya Bhavan have been called by the health department for another meet-

ing on Saturday.

Officials of the Association of Hospitals of Eastern India said after the meeting on Saturday that they would ask for a separate round of discussions.

"We need more clarity about the state government's request to provide 10% beds for free treatment. We understand that even those hospitals which have not taken land at concessional rates from the state will have to provide 10% beds for free treatment of patients referred from government hospitals. We support all government schemes. We will see the best possible way to implement this," said Rupak Barua, president of the Association of Hospitals of Eastern India.

"We would like to hold a separate meeting with the health minister before rolling out the scheme," he added.

Some of the private hospitals said they would seek clarity about what would happen if all beds, except those kept for free treatment, were full and a patient came to the hospital with an emergency health condition.

"We would also ask whether the state government would extend some facilities for the hospitals that had not taken land at a concessional rate but still would have to provide free treatment for 10% beds," said the CEO of a private hospital.

According to sources, at the meeting, health officials cited Section 7 of the West Bengal Clinical Establish-



Sharadwat Mukherjee

ments (Registration Regulation & Transparency) Act, 2017, which stipulates: "Clinical establishments that have received land and/or other facilities from the Government of West Bengal shall provide completely free treatment to the extent of: 10% of Indoor Patients & 20% of Outdoor Patients."

Rule 20 framed under the said Act provides that "the modality for extending such free treatment shall be determined by the government".

Some hospitals, including Manipal Hospitals Salt Lake, Apollo Multispeciality Hospital, KPC Medical College & Hospital, Manipal Hospitals Dhakuria, and the Institute of Child Health Kolkata, had received land at concessional rates, the meeting discussed.

"INK Hospital (Institute of Neurosciences Kolkata is already under an agreement with the KMC (Kolkata Municipal Corporation) to provide 12% free beds, while Islamia Hospital received a grant-in-aid from the government of West Bengal," the minutes of the meeting on

Thursday mentioned.

Health minister Mukherjee directed that all indoor treatment costs, including bed charges, consultation charges, consumables, pharmacy charges, surgeries and related expenses shall be provided free of cost under the Act.

A dedicated facility manager shall be assigned for the free service, and earmarked free beds shall be available across specialities, the meeting decided.

According to sources, some private hospitals agreed to provide free beds based on referral from the appropriate authority of the health department.

Some hospitals sought time for consultation with their higher authorities.