

News in Brief

Double fortification of salt

Anbumani Ramadoss, the Union Health Minister has said that double fortification of salt with both iodine and salt will soon become compulsory in India. Iodized salt has been in use in India for 41 years but the last government had lifted the ban on non-iodized salt. Since then the consumption of iodized salt has fallen from 49% to 37 %. The current government has given a 2 month period to manufacturers. After 15th August 2005 there will be a complete ban on the sale of non-iodized salt in the country. The price hike will be only to the tune of 10 paise/ Kg. The National Institute of Nutrition has been experimenting with double fortification of salt including iron and iodine. The problems of stability and colour have now been overcome and commercial production will soon be a reality in a matter of months. (The Economic Times, 16th June 2005)

Health Insurance in India

Three committees constituted by the insurance regulator of India (IRDA) have recently finalized their recommendations. The first committee was to look into the shortcomings of the health insurance products and come up with proposals to popularize health insurance in India. It has recommended introduction of long term, savings linked health products that would encourage younger people to buy it.

The second committee was to look into the feasibility of stand-alone health insurance companies. It has suggested that hospitals be made stakeholders. So far cashless insurance

schemes are dogged by insurance companies accusing hospitals of over treating patients. Conversely hospitals accuse third party administrators (who are employed by insurers to minimize claims) of interfering with treatment decisions. If hospitals become stakeholders the conflict of interest will diminish.

The third committee is looking into the development of morbidity tables. This will be done by systematic collection of health data. Then insurers will price their policies more scientifically.

The health insurance sector is definitely in for some large-scale reforms in India. (The Economic Times 11 July 2005)

Girl child bias even in educated parents

The Christian Medical Association of India analyzed trends in sex ratios at birth (SRB) of hospitalized births in Delhi. The results are shocking. The sex ratio at birth was 925 for first order births, 731 for second order and 407 for third order births. If the first child was a boy the SRB for the second child is 959 and if the first was a girl the SRB for the second child was 542. If there were 2 previous girls the SRB for the third child is 219. Graduate parents had a SRB of 813 but horribly the SRB was just 769 when both parents were post graduates. However for mothers in high end professional jobs the SRB was 839. The numbers are before us. It is upto us to do something. (The Times of India July 16, 2005)

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