

AIIMS Bibinagar drone service launched to provide quick healthcare services

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Hyderabad: A drone service for healthcare at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Bibinagar was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a virtual event in New Delhi on Tuesday. The project is part of multiple projects related to health sector worth over Rs 12,855 crore which the PM inaugurated or laid the foundation stone on Tuesday.

The launch of drone services for 11 tertiary care centres, including the institute at Bibinagar, took place from the All India Institute of Ayurveda in New Delhi.

For the last few months the trial run was on at the institute. AIIMS Bibinagar is currently using two drones to deliver tuberculosis medications to primary health centres in remote villages and transport sputum samples (suspected TB) back for analysis. This pilot project, conducted as a feasibility study by ICMR under the National TB Elimination Programme, is underway in the tribal and hilly areas of Yadadri-Bhuvanagiri district and has already proven successful. It has cut travel time from two hours to just 5-8 minutes and also protects the privacy of patients.

Executive director of AIIMS Bibinagar, Dr Vikas Bhatia, said, "The initial hiccups have been ironed out and with the official launch of the project we can expand it to other areas like delivery of emergency medicine or blood,

medical help during disaster and flood, food supply etc. While we were doing trials for the project for the last few months, we can now go mainstream, increasing the number of drones too. With this launch, drones will henceforth be part of the national health budget and might even be part of the National Health Mission."

At the Bibinagar campus, a crowd of patients, locals, and doctors waited eagerly to witness the flight of the drone from the institute to the nearest health centre and back. The small-sized unmanned aerial vehicle, with a payload capacity of 3–8 kg and a coverage area of 30–60 km, was operated on Tuesday as part of the launch. It was operated by the ministry of civil aviation licenced drone operator agency TSAW Drone Pvt Ltd. 'Drone Didis' – women from local self-help groups trained to operate drones – helped in the operations.

What happened during the launch:

Two drones took flight to the nearest centre around 10 km away. The drone could cover the distance (to and fro) in just 5 minutes. The sample was kept inside the cabin and remote-control devices were used to control the flight. Staff were informed in advance to collect the samples sent to the receiving centre, which were then taken up for TB testing.