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10% of AIIMS outpatients use kiosks to book visits

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NEW DELHI: An internal audit by AIIMS has found that from June 2016 to May 2017, 3.77 lakh patients booked their appointment through 270 self-service kiosks installed at the institute. This amounts to about 10% of the total patients visiting the AIIMS OPDs annually.

Some patients also booked their appointment through the hospital's portal, mobile app and call centre but majority of patients, the data shows, still prefer to do it over the counter. AIIMS is the only public health institution that has self-service kiosks for booking appointments. Kiosks can also be used to view lab reports and details of various service charges as well.

"Digital AIIMS project was launched in July 2015. The number of takers for various initiatives may not be as expected but it shows that a beginning has been made," Dr Deepak Aggarwal, chairman of computerisation division at AIIMS, told TOI. He added, most patients visiting the institute are poor and they are not conversant with new technologies.

AIIMS audit shows a number of new and old patients who book appointment through kiosks do not attend. This percentage is higher for new cases (53%) compared to follow-up cases (41%). A similar trend was seen in appointments taken through the call centre, institute portal and the mobile app.

Officials said patient absenteeism was not surprising. "We have teamed up with Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) to automatically and intelligently predict the patient turn-up rate by scientifically analysing the historical turn-up data," an official said.

Although 270 kiosks have been installed, a monthly audit has found that 12-15% of the kiosks weren't functional over the past six months due to unavailability of power, hardware issues and network problem among others.

Dr Aarti Bij, chief spokesperson, said a committee had been made to oversee and improve the computerisation programme. "There are plans to integrate various specialties and make the process more user-friendly."

V Srinivasan, former deputy director of AIIMS, said the OPD transformation project had been received positively by many state governments and they had been replicating it in their public hospitals. "Digital is the future. It brings transparency and makes the system more efficient," he said.

Recently, AIIMS also started video consultation for second opinion from specialists. It allows uploading of discharge summary and investigation reports. Officials said trial had been completed successfully and they planned to depute nurses trained in IT to coordinate with doctors for video calls.

"The video-clinic facility is expected to help reduce patient burden, apart from easing the hardship and financial impact suffered by them while travelling from other states for a second opinion or treatment without prior appointment," said Dr Aggarwal.