Editorial

Advancements in Diabetes Mellitus Treatment — A Moment of Urgency and Opportunity as India Marks World Diabetes Day, 14 November, 2025

As India prepares to mark **World Diabetes Day** on **14 November, 2025**, the country faces a paradox: unprecedented scientific progress in the prevention and treatment of diabetes sits alongside an ever-growing epidemic of disease. India remains one of the nations with the largest absolute burden of diabetes in the world — the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) estimates nearly 90 million adults living with diabetes in India in recent years, and global prevalence continues to climb. This “diabetes capital” label is not merely rhetorical; it is a clarion call that demands we both celebrate therapeutic advances and confront the public-health, socioeconomic and ethical challenges that accompany them.

This editorial examines the major therapeutic advances of the last few years — in pharmacology, immunotherapy, regenerative medicine, and diabetes technologies — and places them in the Indian context. My aim is pragmatic: to sketch where modern diabetes care is heading, assess what is realistic and scalable for India, and suggest an evidence-informed pathway so that scientific breakthroughs translate into meaningful health gains for our population.

The Therapeutic Landscape : from Glucose-centric Care to Cardio-renal-metabolic Stewardship

For many decades diabetes care focused narrowly on glucose control. In the last 10-15 years — and accelerating now — treatment goals have broadened: we aim not only for safer glycemic targets but also for preservation of pancreatic function, prevention of cardiovascular and renal complications, weight management, and quality of life. Two interlocking forces underlie this paradigm shift: (1) drugs discovered or repurposed for pleiotropic benefit (eg, SGLT2 inhibitors and GLP-1 receptor agonists) and (2) precision technologies that tailor insulin delivery and monitoring to physiological needs.

Sodium-glucose Cotransporter-2 (SGLT2) inhibitors, initially developed for glycemic control, have now an established role in reducing heart failure hospitalizations and slowing progression of chronic kidney disease — benefits that extend beyond glycemia. Similarly, incretin-based therapies — GLP-1 receptor agonists — have reshaped treatment by improving glycemic control, producing sustained weight loss, and delivering cardiovascular risk reduction in many patient groups. The therapeutic effect-size for weight and metabolic outcomes achieved with newer agents has been nothing short of transformative for selected patients.

The arrival and maturation of dual and multi-agonists : tirzepatide and the obesity-diabetes nexus

Perhaps the most discussed pharmacologic advance in recent years is the advent of dual incretin agonists — molecules that simultaneously target GLP-1 and GIP

receptors (and in trials, sometimes additional pathways). Tirzepatide, a dual GIP/GLP-1 agonist, has produced dramatic reductions in both glycated hemoglobin and body weight in randomized controlled trials. Recent head-to-head and longer-term data published in high-impact journals show that tirzepatide offers superior weight loss and metabolic benefits compared with earlier GLP-1 monotherapy in many patients, and it has opened a new line of thinking: treating obesity as a core therapeutic target to prevent and manage type 2 diabetes. These data hold particular importance for India, where the phenotype of diabetes is heterogeneous and where visceral adiposity and ectopic fat deposition contribute importantly to disease risk spectrum.

However, pharmacology's promise raises practical and ethical questions. These agents are costly, side effects (principally gastrointestinal) can be limiting, and global demand has stressed supply chains. The FDA and other regulators have also recently warned about unapproved formulations and online vendors peddling spurious 'GLP-1' products — a patient-safety issue that demands vigilance from clinicians and policy-makers alike. For India, responsible adoption requires negotiated pricing, local regulatory oversight, and clear clinical guidelines that prioritize those most likely to benefit.

Disease Modification for Type 1 Diabetes : Immunotherapy and the Promise of Delaying — or Preventing — Clinical Onset

Type 1 diabetes (T1D) is no longer perceived as inevitably progressive and untreatable. Immunotherapies designed to modulate or delay autoimmune destruction of β-cells now show clinically meaningful results. Teplizumab, an anti-CD3 monoclonal antibody, has been the first therapy to demonstrate a delay in progression from stage 2 (autoimmunity with dysglycaemia) to stage 3 clinical T1D in high-risk individuals. While teplizumab does not cure T1D, it offers a model for secondary prevention — identifying at-risk people through screening and delaying symptomatic disease. In the long run, this strategy could reduce early life burden, limit hospitalizations for diabetic ketoacidosis, and shift long-term complications curves.

Translating immunotherapy into routine practice in India will require strengthening of screening programs (for islet autoantibodies), building pathways for genetic and immunologic risk stratification, and ensuring cost-effectiveness analyses that incorporate Indian demographics and healthcare costs. Ethical considerations about identifying at-risk children who may never progress (and the psychosocial impact of labeling) must be addressed sensitively.

Regenerative Medicine and Cell Therapy: Islet Replacement Moves from Bench toward bedside

Regenerative approaches — particularly stem cell-derived islet transplantation — have advanced dramatically. Investigational products (for example, Vertex's VX-880/Zimislecel and related products) are showing promising early-phase results: engraftment of insulin-producing cells derived from stem cells has, in some trial participants, reduced or even eliminated exogenous insulin requirements. These results, while preliminary and from carefully selected cohorts, represent the first convincing signals that restoration of endogenous insulin production at scale might become possible in the coming years.

Yet the road to broad availability is complex. Cell therapies raise questions of long-term durability, immunosuppression requirements, manufacturing capacity, cost, and regulatory frameworks — all the more challenging in a resource-limited health system. India should invest in translational research capacity and participate in global consortia so that these therapies, if validated, are accessible to its population rather than remaining available only in high-income settings.

Technologies that close the Loop : CGM, Pumps and Automated Insulin Delivery

Diabetes technology has matured from sporadic self-monitoring to continuous, often automated, systems. Continuous Glucose Monitors (CGMs) provide near real-time glucose readings and trend information and have been shown to reduce hypoglycemia and improve time-in-range. Insulin pumps combined with sophisticated algorithms form hybrid or fully closed-loop systems (the so-called "artificial pancreas"), which adjust basal insulin delivery frequently based on CGM inputs. Systems such as the MiniMed™ 780G and other automated insulin delivery systems now routinely demonstrate improved time-in-range and reduced hypoglycemia in people with type 1 diabetes.

From an Indian perspective, CGM and pump technologies offer game-changing clinical benefits but are limited by cost, supply, and the need for technical support. Pragmatic strategies that could increase access include government tendering for bulk procurement, local manufacturing of consumables, training programmes for allied health professionals in pump and CGM management, and tiered reimbursement models that prioritize the most vulnerable and those at highest risk of severe hypoglycemia.

Cardiometabolic Outcomes and Kidney Protective Therapies : Changing the Prognosis

The last decade has seen therapies that not only lower blood glucose but demonstrably reduce cardiovascular and renal events — the main drivers of diabetes-related morbidity and mortality. SGLT2 inhibitors reduce heart failure hospitalizations and slow chronic kidney disease progression, while some GLP-1 receptor agonists reduce major adverse cardiovascular events. These outcomes data have compelled international guideline committees to recommend tailored therapy based on comorbidities rather than simply starting with metformin for everyone.

For India — where cardiovascular disease and diabetic kidney disease constitute major burdens associated with diabetes — integration of these agents into care pathways could change prognosis at population scale. That said, broad adoption will require policy action to make these drugs affordable and available in public health programmes; inclusion in essential medicines lists; and training clinicians to use these agents appropriately, including monitoring for adverse effects and managing polypharmacy.

Preventive Strategies, Screening and the Role of Weight Management

Pharmacologic advances must be paired with effective prevention. Agents like tirzepatide have shown not only glycemic benefits but also significant reductions in progression from prediabetes to diabetes in trial populations — suggesting that pharmacologic prevention alongside lifestyle measures could be a powerful tool. But prevention at national scale will still hinge on population-level interventions: urban planning that supports physical activity, taxation and regulation of unhealthy foods and sugar-sweetened beverages, school-based nutrition programs, and community-level screening with appropriate referral pathways.

India's public health architecture must prioritize early detection and prevention: opportunistic screening in primary care, simple risk-score tools integrated into community health worker workflows and targeted interventions for high-risk groups. These are low-cost strategies with the potential for high yield if tied to clear referral and incentive structures.

The Health Systems Challenge : Equity, Access and Affordability

No advance in pharmacology or technology is meaningful if it is unavailable to the majority. New drugs and devices are expensive. Without carefully designed policy interventions, we risk widening disparities: a two-tiered system where affluent patients access the latest therapies while the majority rely on older, less effective treatments.

Practical measures India should consider include: negotiating volume-based pricing with manufacturers; stimulating domestic production of biosimilars, GLP-1 analogues and pump consumables; public procurement for high-risk groups; incorporating high-value diabetes medicines and technologies into public insurance schemes; and strengthening the supply chain to prevent stockouts. Additionally, clinician stewardship is essential — selecting patients who derive the most absolute benefit, avoiding off-label use and preventing inappropriate use driven by social media hype.

Real-world Safety, Misinformation and Pharmacovigilance

The extraordinary demand for GLP-1–class drugs and related agents has created a parallel market for unregulated preparations and online vendors selling unapproved products. The regulatory warnings from agencies like the US FDA about unapproved GLP-1 products underscore the need for robust pharmacovigilance and patient education. India's regulators and clinician bodies must be proactive: monitoring adverse events, issuing clear guidance on approved formulations, and educating the public to avoid unsafe products.

Primary Care and Task-shifting : The Manpower Imperative

Managing diabetes at population scale requires decentralization. Specialist endocrinologists cannot deliver care for tens of millions alone. Strengthening primary care through education, decision-support tools, simple algorithms for medication intensification, and task-sharing with trained nurses and community health workers will be essential. Telemedicine can support remote mentoring and continuity, but it must be integrated with in-person services for screening, vaccinations, foot care and urgent complications.

India has strengths to build on: a dense network of primary centers, a large cadre of community health workers, and an expanding digital health ecosystem. The challenge is to align incentives, ensure continual training, and embed quality metrics — such as time-in-range, blood pressure and albuminuria screening — in routine practice.

Research, Registries and an Indian Evidence Base

Most pivotal clinical trials have been conducted in high-

income countries. While global evidence is invaluable, India needs domestic research to answer context-specific questions: differential drug responses in Indian phenotypes, cost-effectiveness in constrained budgets, implementation science on how to scale CGM and insulin delivery, and long-term outcomes of immunotherapy and cell therapy in our population. National registries for diabetes complications, CGM/pump use, and immunotherapy outcomes would provide real-world evidence to guide policy and practice.

Ethical, Social and Psychosocial Considerations

A focus on technologies and drugs should not eclipse the person living with diabetes. Screening children for autoantibodies or prescribing disease-modifying therapies involves psychosocial consequences. Weight-management drugs have benefits and side effects — and their popularity has societal implications for body image and equity. Clinicians must practice compassionate communication, shared decision-making and ensure that interventions respect patient autonomy and cultural contexts.

Call to Action for Clinicians, Researchers and Policy-makers

As we celebrate World Diabetes Day 2025, the message for stakeholders is threefold :

Adopt innovations rationally — Embrace therapies and technologies that demonstrate hard clinical benefit (reduced cardiovascular events, renal protection, meaningful reduction in insulin needs) while stewarding resources and prioritising equity. Use risk-based approaches to select patients most likely to benefit, and develop national clinical guidelines that reflect resource realities.

Invest in prevention and early detection — Scale opportunistic and community screening, invest in school- and workplace-based prevention programmes, and integrate obesity management into standard care pathways. Consider targeted pharmacologic prevention for very high-risk individuals when cost-effective.

Strengthen systems and capacity — Expand primary care capability for diabetes management, negotiate affordable pricing and domestic production where feasible and build registries and pharmacovigilance systems to monitor real-world outcomes and safety.

The Clinician's Role : Balancing Innovation with Pragmatism

For practicing physicians in India, the coming years will demand clinical judgment that balances innovation with pragmatism. New agents like tirzepatide and other dual agonists can be transformative for selected patients — those with obesity, high cardiometabolic risk, or significant burden from hyperglycaemia — but they will not be the right choice for everyone. In resource-limited settings, older medicines (metformin, SGLT2 inhibitors for cardiorenal indications, and safe insulin protocols) remain central. The art of medicine will be to use new tools where they deliver greatest marginal benefit, while ensuring that fundamental elements of care — blood pressure control, lipid management, foot care, vaccination and education — are universally delivered.

Conclusion : Hope Coupled with Responsibility

The scientific advances in diabetes treatment over the past few years give us cause for cautious optimism. Pharmacologic breakthroughs, disease-modifying immunotherapies, regenerative cell-based strategies, and automated technologies together outline a future in which diabetes is not merely managed but its trajectory altered. Yet India's enormous burden of disease means we must be intentional: translating cutting-edge science into public health impact requires policy leadership, equitable financing, workforce transformation, and culturally appropriate patient engagement.

On this World Diabetes Day, we should celebrate scientific progress while reaffirming collective responsibility. India can — and must — move from being the diabetes capital in the sense of burden, to a leader in delivering equitable, evidence-based diabetes care. To do so will require sustained collaboration among clinicians, researchers, industry, patient groups, and policymakers. If we align innovation with equity, the gains of our laboratories and clinical trials can become the health of our people.

Further Reading

1 International Diabetes Federation — data on India and global Diabetes Atlas (2024-2025).
2 NEJM: Comparative data on tirzepatide vs semaglutide (2025).
3 New England Journal of Medicine
4 Reviews on GLP-1 biology and expanding clinical role of incretin-based therapies.
5 Teplizumab and T1D disease-modifying therapy literature and reviews (2022-2025).
6 Vertex / VX-880 / Zimislecel early data on stem cell-derived islet therapies (2024-2025).
7 Technology sources: Medtronic MiniMed™ 780G and automated insulin delivery system information (2024-2025).
8 Safety/regulatory alerts about unapproved GLP-1 products and online vendors (regulatory/press reports).

Hony Editor, JIMA **Kakali Sen**