

Health Carers* in India: Need and Demand for Skill Development

A Qualitative Assessment (2023)

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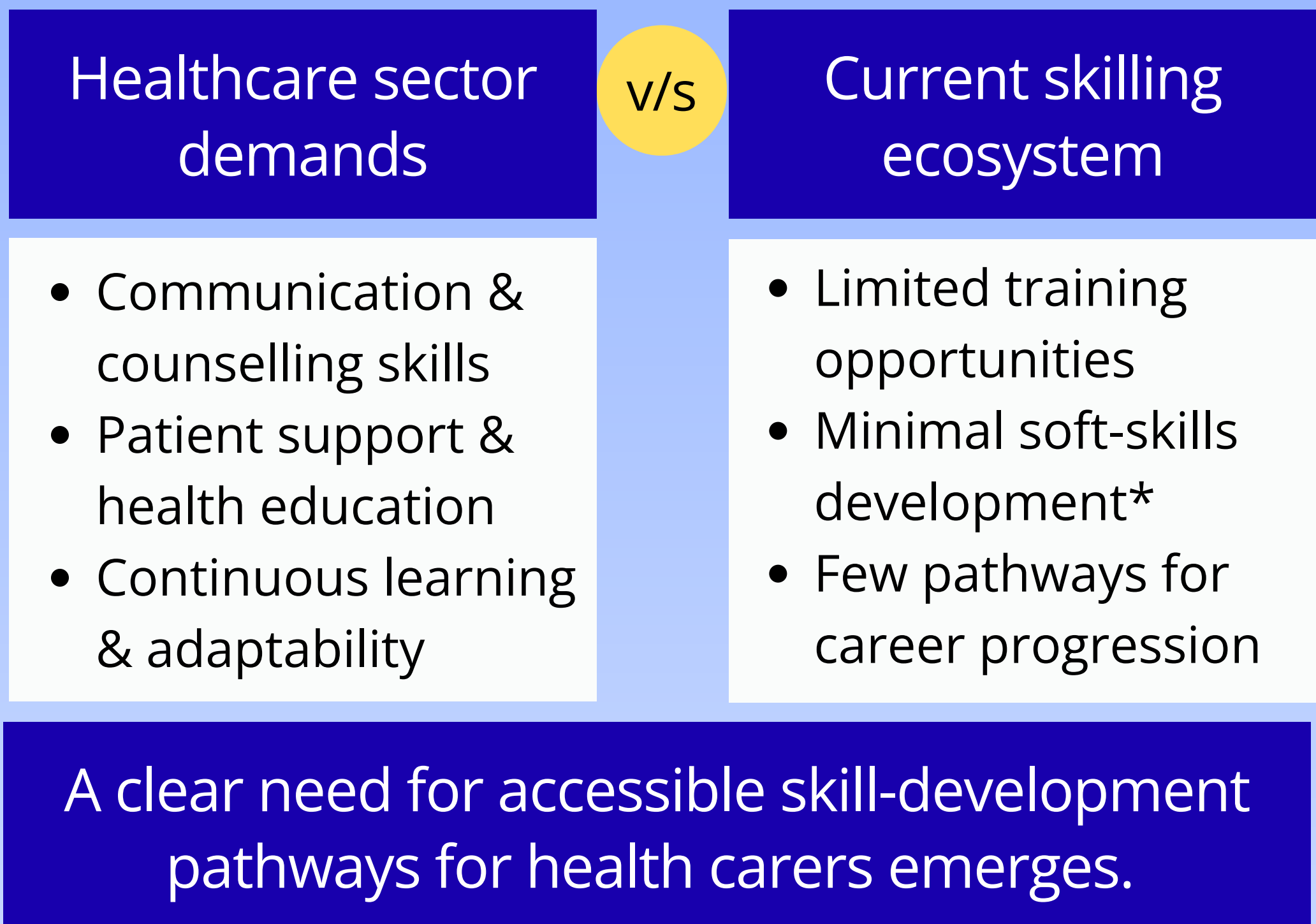
*Health carers refer to nurses, ward girls, ward boys, and health assistants, for the purposes of this report



2023



In their work, Ekam identified a critical gap...



...This raises a key question:
What skills gaps do health carers experience?

*Further, female health carers are often assumed to possess strong soft skills naturally because they are women - a persistent gender stereotype.

Research Framework

Systems Thinking Approach

- Examined broader ecosystem shaping health carers' work
- Included multiple stakeholders, not just health carers
- Examined relationships between people, institutions, and resources

Qualitative Sample: 27 Interviews

6 nurses	6 ward girls & boys	6 assistants
6 nursing teachers	6 doctors/social workers	3 admin staff

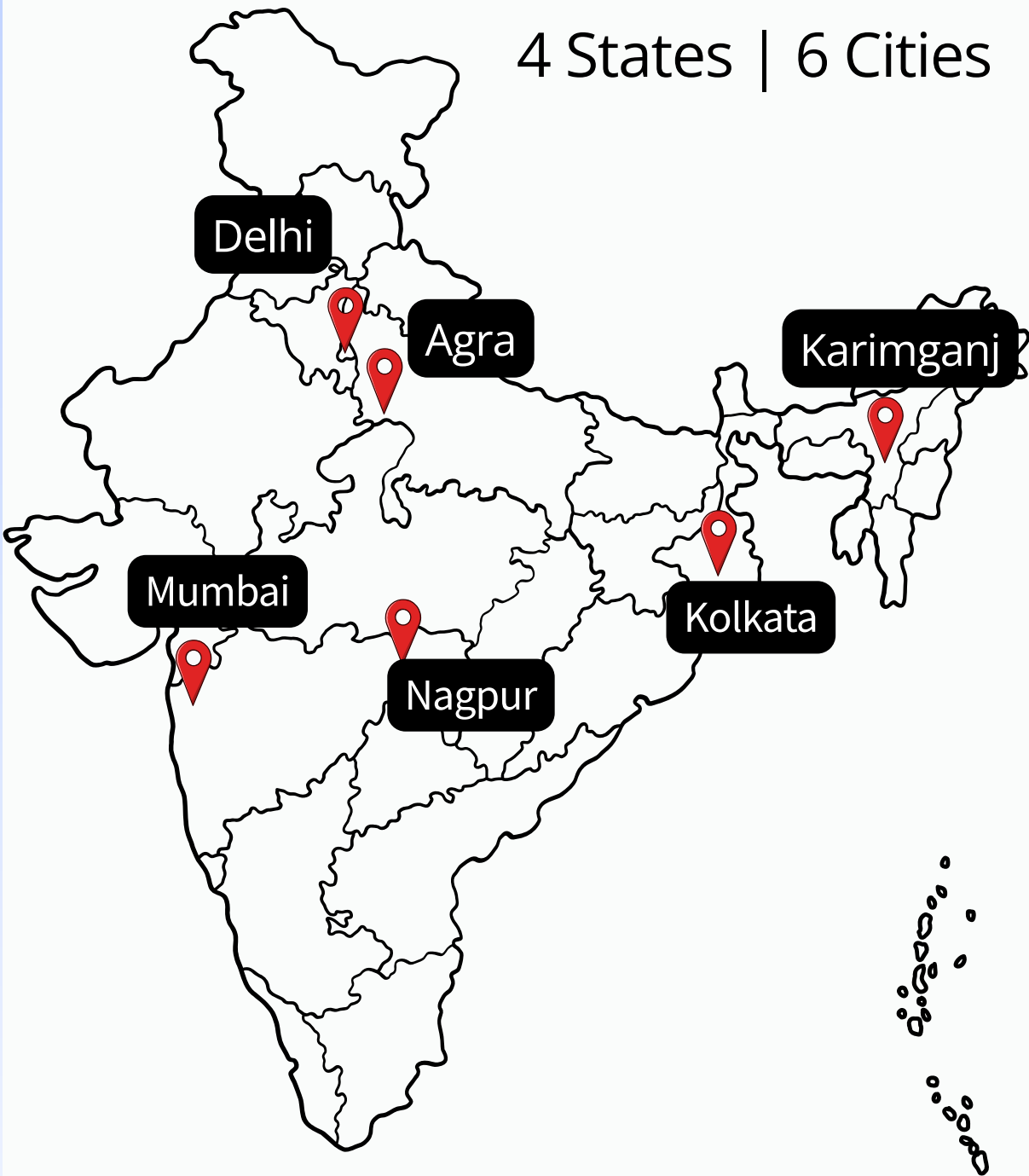
Sample Coverage

18 Healthcare Facilities

- Government and private facilities
- Small and large hospitals

12 Departments

- General ward/OPD
- Neonatal care
- Paediatrics
- Ultrasound
- Haematology
- Orthopaedics
- And others



Big Question 1: Do health carers perceive a need for skill development?

YES

- Health carers demonstrate a **strong willingness** to learn and upskill.
- Many **actively seek information online** to solve day-to-day workplace challenges.
- Skill development is viewed as a pathway to **career advancement**.

"How do I fix a thermometer?" was one example of the practical questions health carers reported searching online.

Key Insight: The demand for skill development is driven not by compliance, but by **aspiration**.

Big Question 1: Do health carer perceive a need for skill development?

Currently, learning and progression pathways are limited

	Entry	Workforce
		→
Nurses	2–4 years of formal training (ANM, GNM, BSc Nursing)	• Few structured opportunities for continued learning • Progression to senior or supervisory roles is often slow and experience-based
Ward girls & boys	Often enter the healthcare workforce directly after schooling	• Limited opportunities for formal skill development • Most learning occurs on the job • Advancement to supervisory roles typically requires many years of experience

Key Insight: A missing middle - Entry Training → **Long Period of On-the-Job Learning** → Promotion, *with very few structured opportunities for skill development in between.*

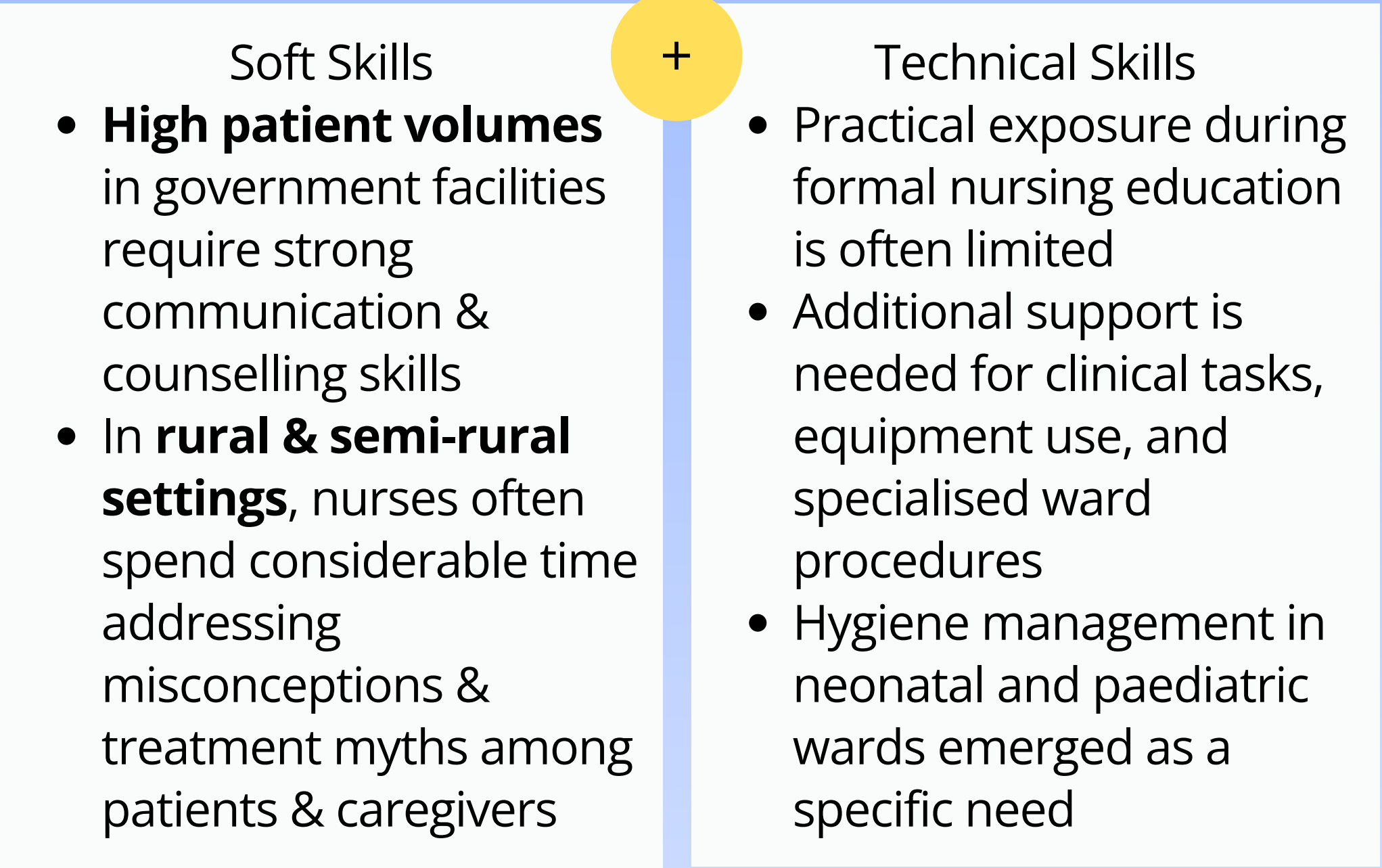
Big Question 2: What skills gaps do health carers identify?

Soft Skills	
Patient Communication • Explaining treatments, medications, & care instructions • Responding to patient questions & concerns	Caregiver/ Family Counselling • Dispelling treatment myths & misconceptions • Supporting adherence to treatment & post-care practices
Managing Difficult Interactions • Handling refusal of treatment, frustration, & conflict • Providing reassurance in high-pressure settings	Teamwork & Coordination • Communicating effectively with doctors & colleagues • Seeking guidance without fear or hesitation
Technical Skills	
Clinical Support • Medical equipment use & maintenance • Basic tests, patient care, & infection control	Patient Management • Record-keeping & documentation • Patient verification & administrative procedures

Key Insight: The most frequently cited skill gaps were not highly specialised clinical skills, but the **everyday communication, counselling, & patient-management skills** that underpin quality care.

Big Question 2: What skills gaps do health carers identify?

Spotlight: **Early-Career Nurses** - who frequently serve as the first point of contact for patients & caregivers/families



Key Insight: Early-career nurses are expected to deliver complex care, while **still building the skills on-the-job**. This challenge is particularly acute in rural and semi-rural settings.

The need for skill development among health carers is both clear and pressing.

"A big challenge is communication. Nurses & ward attendants often struggle to communicate effectively with patients" – Social Worker, Mumbai

"I had no prior training. I learnt to operate these machines by asking my supervisors - it was difficult at first" – Nurse, Delhi

"I have trained several nurses they come with minimal training background. It takes time to learn on the setting" – Doctor, Delhi & Assam

"If a course like this could help me move forward in my career, I would definitely enrol."
– Nurse, Mumbai

Health carers recognise skill gaps, are eager to learn, and currently have limited opportunities to do so.

What opportunity does this present for Ekam Foundation Mumbai?

Bridge the gap between education and practice for early-career health carers

- Learning opportunities must fit around work responsibilities
- Training needs vary by role, experience level, and setting
- Learners value practical, immediately applicable content
- Delivery choices (language, duration, format) shape participation



Health carers are expected to deliver complex clinical and patient-facing care, often with limited opportunities for continued learning.

Investing in their skills is an investment in both the workforce and the quality of care they provide.