

## **Pandemic View of Pharma Sector in India**

The frequency of occurrence of infectious outbreaks has increased worldwide. Enhanced exploitation of the natural environment, greater global integration and travel has led to epidemics turning into Pandemics and currently the world is witnessing one of such deadliest of all times in human history, COVID-19. Beyond the shadow of a doubt, the Pandemic will have considerable economic and social cost on the human civilization, quite evident over decades. The novel coronavirus SARS COV-2 that is responsible for COVID-19 is fifth pandemic coronavirus in humans. Health practitioners worldwide took SARS as a warning alarm to boost outbreak responses, and experiences from that pandemic helped diseases like Ebola, H1N1 and Zika to keep under control. COVID-19 pandemic exposed the insubstantial health system and services of the most developed countries of the world and is pressing the countries to make the tough choice as to how to suffice the needs of their citizens with the fast-draining resources and high economic cost.

India's healthcare infrastructure and services rank 145 among 195 countries globally in terms of quality and accessibility and it is no secret that it is sub-par and highly insufficient to cater the needs of 1.35 billion people of India. Even the developed countries like UK, USA, Italy, Spain which spend about eight to ten per cent of GDP on healthcare services are collapsing, so one can easily imagine the shivers given by this pandemic to the Indian government which spends a meagre 1.4 per cent of GDP on health services. Realising how insufficient such spendings are, the government plans to increase the spending to 2.5 per cent of GDP in the coming two to three years. Steps have been taken in the recent past to develop medical infrastructure and manpower through the expansion of primary healthcare setup, opening new tertiary institutions, increasing number of medical colleges and seats but still there is a long way to go. The need for adequate quality health services is being felt more than ever before at present crisis, however, this realisation will expectantly accelerate the strengthening of healthcare infrastructure in India.

Over the past few decades, India has emerged as the pharmacy of the world and is the major supplier of generic medicines worldwide. India has a contribution of 20 per cent in global supply by volume of generic medicine and 50 per cent of global demand for vaccines. The contribution of India has been again highlighted amidst this global crisis as India gave permission to export hydroxychloroquine to the majority of the countries, saving the lives of thousands of people. Despite India's strong position in the global Pharma sector, its over-dependence on China for bulk drugs like Penicillin-G and lot of intermediates is a big flaw. Nevertheless, the bottleneck has been recognised by the pharmaceutical sector, however, progress in this direction remains slow as the cost being a major factor in the end market. Looking analytically, even the present grey situation pose a silver lining and things can turn around as a big opportunity for India. With the increase in negative sentiments against China for concealing the vital information that could have prevented the massive spread of COVID-19, many countries are weighing the option for shifting their manufacturing out of China and naturally India with a high ratio of young population, cheap labour and high internal demand is a favoured destination for such countries. Now the ball is in the government's court to take leverage of such a situation.

At present, almost the entire world with India being no exception is dependent on China for medical equipment like ventilators, mask, PPE and diagnostic kits. In India, many non-medical equipment companies are considerably contributing to the manufacturing of ventilator and other medical equipment at affordable cost needed to sail through this pandemic. In the long term, as the situation will ease out, using these equipments efficiently will eventually improve the healthcare system of India. Further, a push through make-in-India campaign will strengthen the delivery system. Additionally, with the synergy of the Indian consumer, manufacturing of medical equipment can be a natural way for the expansion of the pharmaceutical sector. Undoubtedly, a strong Pharma industry will be a pillar for providing affordable healthcare services in India.

Amidst the Pandemic, strong trends towards the use of technology, mobile hospital, telemedicine and online training for paramedical staff and nurses to combat the infection is evidently witnessed. All such measures will ultimately improve healthcare access and affordability even in remote areas. Foreseeing the urgent need of hospitals in the adversely affected cities several judicious experiments are being carried out, most striking being the conversion of train coaches into isolation wards. Such an innovative approach to making mobile hospital was inspired out of necessity but such a flexible concept, if retained and built upon can be a clue to supplement substantially the healthcare facilities in India.

Thus, as we face this colossal problem and focus on passing through with minimum harm to human lives, society and economy, there are opportunities to be explored for improvement in the health care system in India.



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