How had COVID-19 changed the shape of Public Health in India

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Public health has never been a subject of such focus. Although critical in the dynamics of every country and society, it is witnessing the change it has never thought it would in this century! However "Change", which is the only constant, is being radically changing „health systems" due to SARS-CoV-2. And the change is extra-ordinary! COVID-19, a novel strain of beta corona virus related to SARS and MERS, has caused more than twenty three million people affected worldwide till date. First reported from Wuhan in China in December 2019, "COVID-19" is testing the health infrastructure and societal response capabilities reminiscent of the 1918 global pandemic of Influenza that probably resulted in ~ 50 million deaths worldwide. The WHO declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020 [1].

India with more than 3 million infected cases with 56,883 mortality [2, 3]; country is revamping and re-strategizing its health policies and guidelines ever since to combat this pandemic for its 1.3 billion population.

Public health is embracing the collaboration with corporate partners and private health players with a new rigour. Public private partnership is seen an amalgamation towards realising national health interest together. Research and Innovation has attracted a new high with state and central governments investing in more in this area ever before [4-6]. This is proved with major example of special financial support being provided by National Research Development Corporation (NRDC) in the research domain and special support to 50 innovations and startups by Department of Science and Technology (DST) [7, 8].

Moreover, collaborations with foreign players in the development of COVID-19 vaccine has further the value of partnership in achieving common sustainable development goals (SDG).

In addition, while pandemic forced India to critically view its low financial allocation of 1.28 percent of its GDP on public health [9]; COVID-19 health emergency has proved the significance of NGO partners and contribution of corporate social responsibility in supporting the public health infrastructure, in hard to reach areas. The immense work contributed through COVID-19 testing, generating health awareness and humanitarian work amid migration due to national lockdown, has changed the way these sectors are now seen as an indispensable arm of public health [5].

Nevertheless, the unprecedented pandemic put forth the shortcomings of Indian health system, which ironically has resulted in the refinement of the country's health approach and revisiting of its overall health strategies. India has ever since fast-tracking its technological advancement in the health systems. Tele-health and use of artificial intelligence (AI) has taken a front seat and already embodied its place in healthcare in India, in the otherwise less preferred tools when it comes to health. Some of its examples are web supported mobile applications like Aarogya Setu being used for Contact Tracing, Building Healthcare workforce, Education, Distant Monitoring using GPS and Bluetooth Technology.

With more focus on preventive health strategies, country is being strengthening its existing health facilities like never before. However, the pandemic is testing the pillar of public health system of country, and challenges its efficiency; the same has given an opportunity to revisit its health policies and infrastructure to better the shape of public health in India.

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