

COVID 19's growing impact calls for immediate ramp up of healthcare across the world

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Dr. Neeraj Mahindroo, Dean, School of Health Sciences, UPES shares his views on COVID 19's growing impact



COVID 19: Reveals a stark difference in global healthcare

The COVID 19 pandemic has bought a global spotlight on the inadequacies of the healthcare sector across the world. With WHO issuing guidelines and appealing to the nations across the world to collaborate in fight against this pandemic, the present situation on the ground has left nations struggling to fulfil the growing demand for healthcare workers.

In the grim times of the coronavirus outbreak, it is reassuring to know that these workers are there to help the patients, but the growing number of cases have put lot of pressure on the healthcare workers and the short supply of the medical equipment, test kits and personal protective equipment have made things even harder.

As part of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, all member states have agreed to achieve universal health coverage by 2030. A recent study by International Labour Organization, reveals that countries' capacities to recruit and retain health workers vary significantly across regions. This unequal distribution exacerbates inequities in access to health services.

Furthermore, Health Employment Data suggests that high-income countries have both the most skilled health workers and the largest health sectors relative to their population size. Whereas, in many low-income countries, large parts of the population do not have access to essential health services due to the lack of health workers, particularly in rural and remote areas. In Africa, the average number of workers employed in the health sector per 10,000 people is 57, and many of the

region's poorer nations have far fewer.

When WHO declared the virus a global health emergency, the major worry was the challenge to contain the virus if it spreads in rural and remote areas where the availability of the healthcare facilities and workers is even more limited.

Current Scenario in India

India has a huge population of 1.3bn with limited availability of healthcare facilities, which does call for major ramp up in our healthcare infrastructure and human resources. Covid-19 has made us realise that we need to increase the investment several folds in this sector.

With an aim to contain the infectious diseases and improve the overall wellbeing of the people, India has taken several initiatives like Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and Ayushman Bharat over last few years. These campaigns have helped to a certain extent in the improving of the country's hygiene levels and made us more aware as individuals.

India also has a pharma edge since we contribute the second largest share of pharmaceutical and biotech workforce in the world and is the largest provider of generic drugs globally. This has worked well in our favour where India is producing and exporting 'Hydroxychloroquine', a drug which has been projected as one of the repurposed drug for Covid-19.

Given the current crisis, we decided to go on the lockdown at the right stage and our healthcare workers have been relentlessly working since, to both treat the patients and curb the spread of the virus.

Way Forward

Government Policies

National healthcare scheme: The first step we should take is have an universal National healthcare scheme which should go beyond just the pandemic period. One of the best examples for this is Taiwan. They with help of their National Health Insurance Scheme were able to contain the virus and has only 420 cases, even though they are so near China with regular travel and trade. COVID 19 has impacted everyone irrespective of demography and geography. So to win the battle against it, healthcare should be universal.

Ayushman Bharat is one of the step taken by our government in this direction. The question that needs to be asked is can these systems be out to better use during such a crisis. Can the health insurance under such schemes be used for the providing healthcare and loss of wages to poor and wagedworkers during such outbreaks.

India's youth: A ray of hope in these times

With the demand for a better healthcare system getting more focus, we need to best utilise our resources and prepare ourselves for the future. We need highly skilled and knowledgeable professionals.

India is amongst the countries that has the largest talent pool of young scientists, researchers, engineers, doctors etc. Much more than ever before, we need to change our curriculums, which are still more theoretical than based on case studies and experiential training. We must focus on increasing innovation quotient, out-of-box thinking and equipping our future professionals with soft skills to make them industry ready.

At UPES, we firmly believe in the importance of exposing our students to an industry like environment where they are given experiential training. The UPES School of Health Sciences has also entered into strategic alliances with Synergy Institute of Medical Sciences and Wockhardt to help students gain hands on industry knowledge

Adoption of Technology

Given the current situation adoption of technology in the healthcare space has accelerated which could have otherwise taken more time. Integration of the healthcare sector with technologies like Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, Machine Learning has become imperative.

We are witnessing a gradual adoption of these technologies with doctors taking the OPDs virtually through telecalls and video calls during lockdown due to COVID 19. Technology is also helping us in health analytics in a big way to study infections and research for vaccines.

The way healthcare is being delivered is changing and as we move fast to keep pace with changing technology, new skills will be required, and our students and future professionals need to be exposed to new age technology advancements.

While our fight with COVID 19 is strong and India is moving in the right direction to best curtail the virus, it is also now that we must begin preparing ourselves for the future which is better equipped, safe and sustainable.