

# Lessons on Preparedness and Response for Pandemic

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## INTRODUCTION

The Novel Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic began in Wuhan (China) in December 2019. It has spread over 200 countries with more than 21 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 and over 700,000 deaths (August 16, 2020).<sup>[1]</sup> This is despite the explicit warning of the World Health Organization in 2011 implying that world is ill-prepared to respond to a severe influenza pandemic or to any similarly global, sustained and threatening public-health emergency.<sup>[2]</sup> Nevertheless, as the inherent vulnerabilities of the existing health systems have been brutally exposed by the present pandemic, it is imperative that we learned better preparedness and response for a pandemic.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Need for a Global Contingency Plan

Contingency planning does not usually receive high political and budgetary priority because of being long drawn out and lacking immediacy.<sup>[3]</sup> Due to the global nature of pandemics there is a need for united contingency planning with intergovernmental cooperation at its heart. Further, regular engagement with the public and scientific organizations on issues of crisis preparedness and contingency planning would allow better informed, scrutinized and appropriate policies.

## Bridging the Gap between Inter-Country Response Disparities

The vast disparity in the testing and diagnostic coverage between countries makes predictions of transmission and mortality trends unreliable, which in turn result in questionable policy and strategy formulations.<sup>[4]</sup> The distinct disparity in the availability of beds (including intensive care units) and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) between different parts of the world largely altered the prognosis of individual patients and the pandemic in a country.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Enhancing Prophylactic, Diagnostic and Therapeutic Capacities

COVID-19 has unmasked new synergy potentials including the large-scale manufacture of life-saving medical equipment (For E.g. ventilators) by engineering companies which otherwise would remain largely untapped. Similarly, there is a need to realign research priorities towards current clinical priorities by incentivization and creating adequately funded alliances between government, scientific bodies, industries and clinicians. This would allow to use the untapped potential of commercial industry which could work in collaboration both for mutual benefit and greater good of the citizens.<sup>[6,7]</sup>

## Improving the Resilience of Health Systems

There is a need of taskforce comprising of crisis strategy-tactics specialists with established and effective chains of command to plan for crisis preparedness and suggest recommendations to enhance healthcare system resilience. There is also a need for regular assessments of the existing human resource and infrastructure in the form of projected, simulated stress tests for the system. Another important factor to increase health system resilience would be through digitization of doctor-patient interaction to increase the coverage, capacity and reach of a single health professional.<sup>[8,9]</sup>

## CONCLUSION

COVID-19 pandemic has proven to be a colossal burden and a monumental challenge to the existing health care system across the globe. At the same time, it has brought to the forefront some unique opportunities to strengthen the healthcare sector and revamp the prevailing healthcare delivery approaches. This crisis once again reiterates that we all live in a world where we can only fight a pandemic through diligent, constant and inclusive intersect oral and international coordination and effort.

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