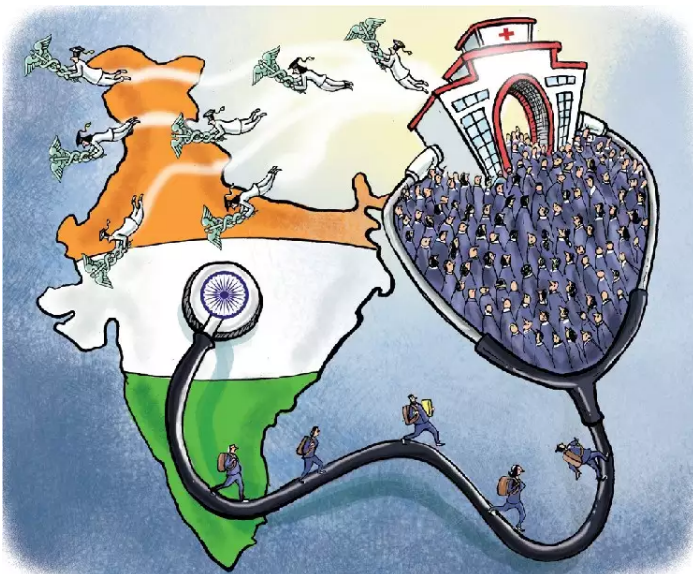


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Indian healthcare ecosystem takes an integrated approach to fight COVID-19 : Prof. N K Ganguly, former DG, ICMR

The pandemic has provided us with a unique opportunity to enable enormous capacity building of the entire health sector which can be achieved through a multi-stakeholder approach

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by

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The world is witnessing an unprecedented outbreak which has plunged economies into a deep coma as we strive to fight the novel [coronavirus](#). As we find ourselves in the middle of a pandemic that is far from waning, India braced itself for the unexpected by shoring up its healthcare and pharmaceutical [industry](#) to ensure that the public healthcare system is not burdened by the onslaught of cases. From educating the people about the virus itself to capacity and capability building in the healthcare workers and ensuring availability of test kits and therapeutics to meet domestic and export demands, there has been immense cohesion in India's approach to the pandemic. With cooperation from the [private sector](#), the [public healthcare ecosystem](#) has risen to the challenge posed by the pandemic and ensured access to affordable medicines and [medical equipment](#).

Even as disruptions in supply chains across borders raised anxieties on the availability of various drugs, causing a shortage of essential medicines in the initial stages of the lockdown, the pharmacies in India were well equipped to meet the demand. Pharmaceutical Companies have ensured uninterrupted supply of medicines and are ramping up their manufacturing capacity to meet the non-COVID demand in addition to repurposing drugs as potential therapies for COVID-19. Take for instance, when it comes to COVID-19, not only do we have these in ample supply of some of the most common drugs used for managing the infection spread, we are also home to other high-end antibiotics. Indian pharma companies are also working on bringing out vaccine for COVID 19 infection and are also closely studying the efficacy of other drugs in treating the novel virus.

Responsible for supplying a major share of the world's demand for generics, with 40 percent of its market in the U.S. and 25 percent U.K., the world is looking at us as the country struggles to flatten the curve. Even with India depending majorly on

imports of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) produced in China, the government took measures to bolster the domestic market. By inviting and encouraging private sector and foreign investment, the pharma and healthcare sectors are well on their way to self-sufficiency.

In fact, even with supply chain disruptions around the world, the Indian [pharmaceutical industry](#) across its multiple layers has effectively been able to meet the demand. The sector has not only ensured the supply of effective medications for the infection but other non-COVID drugs required for patients with chronic conditions as well.

Having said that, there are still multiple variables which pose a hinderance to the growth of the health ecosystem – which were brought to the forefront as a result of the pandemic. The secondary healthcare system is still weak in the aspirational districts and rural healthcare (in the peri-urban areas) is under-equipped to sufficiently care for patients. These gaps were revealed consequent to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus. The pandemic paralyzed the private [health system](#) in the country as well as the public system. The migrant exodus only added to this paralysis. In order to address these gaps and avoid overburdening of the public healthcare system, it is necessary to adopt a multisectoral approach. Given the gaps, it is imperative that there be a multi-sectoral outlook towards the healthcare ecosystem, with pharma as the nucleus.

However, the pharma industry should be involved in sectors other than medicines as well. One of the most notable problems faced by the country was the lack/shortage of testing kits. Owing to low manufacturing capacity, specifically for COVID test kits, India had to import test kits from China, which turned out to be faulty. Following this, Indian pharmaceutical companies also ventured into manufacturing indigenous testing kits, whilst ensuring highest level of quality standards & access to medicine, working closely with the ICMR.

The pandemic has provided us with a unique opportunity to enable enormous capacity building of the entire health sector which can be achieved through a multi-stakeholder approach. This is evident in our approach towards the classification of the districts into red, orange and green, depending on the caseload. The healthcare ecosystem was scaled up to respond to the pandemic. The cohesion between the healthcare and IT sector was distinct, specifically with the launch of the tracking app *Aarogya Setu*. Besides, the Indian healthcare system, and the pharma ecosystem by extension, has immense potential too. The Government has also provided a boost for domestic drug-makers and manufacturers by approaching them to manufacture active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) as well as personal protection kits (PPEs). This multi-stakeholder approach will enable the Indian healthcare ecosystem to scale extraordinary heights.

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