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Socio-Cultural | Covid shows the way: India health care system on the cusp of revolution



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THEME

VISHWA GURU: HOW NEAR, HOW FAR?

With the pandemic baring its fangs, Indian health research is reaching areas where it didn't venture earlier. (Photo credit: TV9)

News

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's internationalising yoga has paid dividends and the world has taken note.
- Insacog was established to expand the whole-genome sequencing of SARS-CoV-2 virus across India.
- The country's vaccination programme has been one of the largest in the world.



Health issues have emerged as an effective soft power tool for nations like India, to pursue their economic interests and even open up avenues in diplomatic relations.

That should not come as a surprise. What is on offer here is, perhaps, the widest range of medicinal facilities available anywhere in the world. From modern state-of-the-art hospitals to traditional medicinal systems like Ayurveda, which have for the millennia, energised and improved the health of hundreds and millions of Indians.

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The Indian pharmaceutical industry is the world's third-largest by volume and 14th largest in terms of value. The total annual turnover of pharmaceuticals stood at Rs. 2,89,998 crore for the year 2019-2020, according to annual report of the Department of Pharmaceuticals.

A CARE Ratings assessment of 2021 concluded that the "The main factors that are expected to drive the growth of industry are ability to leverage the opportunity available for Indian pharma companies due to expiry of the patent drugs across the globe, ebbing of regulatory risks, adoption of various strategies to de-risk from dependency on China for key raw materials, increasing trend in PE investments, and solid fundamentꝰ f the industry. Exploiting these opportunities, CARE Ratings expects the credit risk profiles of its rated entities to remain stable to positive during FY22 and FY23."



India has one of the best health care systems in the world. What is now needed is more investment in government sector healthcare."

He told TV9: "As of January 2022, 19 AIIMS are operating in the country and five more are expected to become operational by 2025. Proposals have been made for six more AIIMS. There are there are 542 medical colleges and 64 standalone PG Institutes in India, the qualifications from which are recognised by the National Medical Commission. Each medical college has a 750-bed hospital. Then there are primary health centres (PHCs) in remote areas as well as district hospitals, many of which are functioning well. But more government funds are needed and plans are afoot. Ayushman Bharat needs to be revisited, but it is certainly a good idea."

Also Read - [India records 8,084 fresh Covid infections, TPR over 3% in last 24 hours](#)

Put simply, India's place as a health power – particularly for those aspiring for quality health at affordable prices – has led to the creation of several stakeholders such as state, non-state and multilateral actors, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), private-sector companies and a vast range of public health facilities. They can battle tremendous odds as the recent pandemic has demonstrated.

How does the system work, despite its many drawbacks? In the Harvard Business Review, Vijay Govindrajan and Ravi Ramamurti offer the following prognosis: "Necessity spawns innovation. Despite the pressing demand and constrained supply, a few relatively new Indian hospitals have devised ways of providing world-class health care affordably—and to scale. These hospitals target well-off patients, which forces them to provide care that meets global quality standards. But their purpose is to serve everyone, including patients with very low incomes, which puts pressure on the organisations to lower costs dramatically. Such a business model scales because the low costs of these hospitals attract large volumes of patients and allow the overall enterprise to be profitable."

Also Read - [India's life expectancy goes from 49.7 to 69.7, registering an increase of 20 years in last 4 decades](#)



Prime Minister Narendra Modi's internationalising yoga has paid dividends and the world has taken note. "Wellness travel has seen a huge spike in recent times with people swapping their cocktail-fuelled beach vacations for detox and active retreats. Spa resorts have incorporated yoga nidra, acupuncture, meditation sessions and complemented them with specially-curated diet plans to assist with a detox," wrote Vogue, American monthly fashion and lifestyle magazine that covers many topics, including haute couture fashion, beauty, culture, in its January 2018 edition.

With the pandemic baring its fangs, Indian health research is reaching areas where it didn't venture earlier. Genomic surveillance, for instance, is one space, which has grown exponentially.

Addressing the Second Global Covid Virtual summit last month, Prime Minister Modi announced that India's genomic sequencing network would be extended to neighbouring countries.

He said that the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (Insacog), a national multi-agency consortium of genome sequencing laboratories established in December 2020, would soon be extended to neighbouring countries.

Insacog was established to expand the whole-genome sequencing of SARS-CoV-2 virus across India with the aim of understanding how the virus spreads and evolves. Any changes to the genetic code, or mutations in the virus, can be observed based on the analysis and the sequencing of samples done in the laboratories under Insacog.

There can be little doubt that India's genomic consortium has contributed significantly to the global database on the virus. Despite the odds, it would be no exaggeration to suggest that India has the potential to be the world's pharmacy.

The country's vaccination programme has been one of the largest in the world. Around 94 percent of the adult population of the country has received at least one dose and over 80 percent of the adult population has been covered by both doses, latest figures suggest.