

# How India Addressed COVID-19 Challenges with Strategic Partnerships

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## How India Addressed COVID-19 Challenges with Strategic Partnerships

Dr. S D Gupta | Aug 10, 2020



The novel coronavirus outbreak has shelved healthcare infrastructures and challenged economies around the world. India is no exception. The pharmacy of the world, India found itself at crossroads as the virus caught our health systems off guard with a steep rise in numbers within months, and cases crossing a 10 lakh mark. For the world's second-largest populated country, the roadblocks are many. However, despite the initial challenges, the Indian public healthcare system worked in tandem with the private players and used an integrated approach to ensure that the public needs are met with. Even as the global supply chain disruptions raised major concerns over the delivery of essential medicines to and from India, keeping in mind our dependence on China for Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs), we rose to the challenge and ensured uninterrupted supply of quality and affordable medicines to both domestic and global markets.

Despite the disruptions in supply chains and the pandemic's outbreak, the pharmaceutical sector in India saw a growth of 8.9 per cent in March due to stockpiling. However, in spite of that, the next few months did not seem to affect the sales of many essential drugs like antibiotics, cardiac therapy, vitamins and those for pains and analgesics. This is a result of cohesion between the healthcare system and the pharma industry. From zero PPE kits in March to producing 4.5 lakh kits each day, from reducing the dependence on APIs from China to being able to produce enough HCQ to even provide for exports, the healthcare industry in India has left no stone unturned to ensure that patients do not suffer at the cost of accessibility.

The country's efforts to contain the infection have been immensely collaborative and sufficient. These collaborative efforts between the healthcare system, the pharma sector and the Government also extends to capability building in the health infrastructure. The Government, in an effort to ensure preparedness, worked alongside the healthcare ecosystem to shore the rural health infrastructure. Owing to which, the health system in these areas is well-equipped to deal with an onslaught of cases.

Having said that, India is also the largest producer/manufacturer of pharmaceutical products in the world. Traditionally known for the manufacture of generic drugs, the Indian pharma companies are now focusing efforts on research, development and innovation as well. As a result of the pandemic, many pharmaceutical companies ventured into new drug discovery and vaccine development for COVID-19. There was no shortage in the production of non-COVID drugs (such as those for diabetes) either – the industry ensured uninterrupted supply of medicines despite facing challenges due to the lockdown. Ever since the first case broke out in late-January, the Government encouraged the use of masks and social distancing. Hospitals were scaled up to deal with the infection, healthcare workers were trained and the number of ventilators was increased. In collaborating with the healthcare sector, the Government also decided to ramp up the domestic manufacture of personal protective kits, masks and sanitizers to ensure adequate supply to the front-line workers. This shows the healthcare sector's commitment to a patient-centric approach.

From putting a cap on testing prices to make it more affordable to the public, to working closely with multiple stakeholders across the states to ensure that telemedicine and other mediums are used to improve access to medicines, the pharmaceutical industry has responded to the pandemic keeping patient safety in mind.

The Government and the industry cohesively ensured that there is no burden on COVID patients and provided them with free medicines as well, reaffirming their commitment towards patient centricity. COVID has caused severe disruption to industries across the world. However, collaborative efforts between various communities will prove helpful in arresting the spread of the virus.

We all are living with our fond hopes that pandemic will soon be over. Herd immunity will play an important role in arresting the rage of COVID 19. Incidentally, over 70 % of cases are asymptomatic and another 15-20 % are mild, one of the eccentric thinking making rounds that herd immunity will develop as the majority of population contract infection. The other way is to create herd immunity by using vaccine specific to COVID 19, which is not yet available.

All eyes are set on the development of a new vaccine against Coronavirus. The Indian pharmaceutical industry has taken on this challenge of developing a low-cost new vaccine and save millions of lives around the world.



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Dr. Shiv Dutt Gupta is a leading Public Health professional with a distinguished academic and research career. He has done pioneering work of creating and establishing new discipline of health management, and promoting research in health policy and health systems and programmes. Currently Dr Gupta is Trustee Secretary of the Indian Institute of Health Management Research (IIHMR), India, Chairman and Distinguished Professor, IIHMR University, Jaipur.