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Dr ST Swamy, Founder and Director, RT Diagnostics

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Imprints of Covid-19 and its impact

Based on the experiences of past two years, we intend to aggregate and deliver a concise note on impact of Covid-19. Like other encounters of natural devastating infectious diseases due to biological agents that have impacted with serious calamities and causalities in the past, Covid-19 also has got *a tale of two sides* with *opportunities and risks*.

Medical infrastructure

Growth of medical infrastructure like hospitals, clinics, laboratories, home health services, and expansion of existing medical facilities has witnessed growth during the period of corona, both under private and public health infrastructure with expectation of high-volume business potential

Healthcare financing

Supply of credit by various financial institutions focussed mainly on healthcare with liberalized credit terms. Supply induced credit enabled fast growth of medical and healthcare industry during this period.

Pharma giants in diagnostics

Many pharma giants like Lupin Laboratories and Cipla started focusing on diagnostic services, diagnostic equipment, and diagnostic kits to have a control over all segments of the healthcare industry. It is expected to create an ethical and healthy competition in order to witness affordable and accessible healthcare for every citizen of our country. A new ray of hope has emerged at such demanding times by the contributions of pharmaceutical giants and their role is truly impeccable in combating during warfront situations at such deprived times.

Since enough threshold is created in the field of diagnostics, to meet the current crisis situations, many corporate and pharmaceutical giants have stepped in, being a perfect apt platform to launch and establish their feet in the such demanding and promising arena.

Aggregators

Technology-driven online service providers (aggregators) in healthcare and diagnostic industry have created huge awareness among the public about online consulting, online pharma supply, wellness packages with their aggressive promotional activities like SMS, emails, and social media. As survival crisis escalates at one end, new opportunities also emerge simultaneously to meet the crisis. So is the role of the middle mediators who approximate among the patients and doctors or

hospitals and laboratories to meet their demands. Technology-driven online aggregators have mediated tie-ups, connecting the two ends (approximating the patients and the medical fraternities like doctors, clinics and hospitals, diagnostic laboratories, etc.), though there are some quality and ethical issues.

Corporate diagnostic players

Major diagnostic service providers like SRL Diagnostics, Lal PathLabs, Metropolis, Krsnaa Diagnostics, Thyrocare, PharmEasy, and Tata 1mg, have started widening their geographical network with pumping of huge investments both by organic and inorganic route.

System of medicine

Non-allopathic system of medicine started widely using diagnostic services like CT scan, D-Dimer, IL6, CRP, procalcitonin, and similar parameters in diagnostic arena. Apart from allopathic modern medicine, other systems of medicine like Ayurveda, siddha, homeopathy, and Unani formulations have also equally contributed during this situation,

Resource crunch

Medical manpower shortage is realized during this pandemic and this has induced to focus on increasing, especially, para-medical manpower by the educational institutions. This will lead to attain optimum ratio between medical professionals versus general population. Rise in demand for medical manpower has attracted non medicos and it is due to the expansion of healthcare infrastructure and healthcare finance.

The tireless services rendered by the medical fraternity have absolutely masked the potential threat of this infectious disease. Nevertheless, many medical professionals have also sacrificed their lives, and we acknowledge those noble souls and their family members with utmost respect for their service and courage.

Stress on clinicians and paramedics

Covid-19 exposure, like every other pandemic, has imposed unprecedented threat to doctors' physical and mental health (stress, anxiety, and depression). Thus, Covid-19 is likely to have had a significant impact on frontline medical manpower. Due to the fear and to avoid the risk of spreading Covid-19, many hospitals were shut down and as a consequence of this, the situation aggravated and people showed their frustration and threatened to physically assault doctors and healthcare workers.

ST SWAMY

Psychological impact

Though the Covid pandemic has made many strong and positive mind set of our population, the psychological stress impacted to a large extent. Other than Covid-19 physical health complications (mainly symptomatic neurological manifestations on the brain), it has also caused deep rooted psychological impressions, such as apart from any family man's pre-existing constraints of his livelihood, this Covid crisis has added further burden to it. The current situations, such as isolation due to quarantine (including lock down, social distancing restrictions, wearing masks, etc.), loss of income, fear of getting Covid, grief on account of demise of known ones and their remembrance has further invoked additional panic and is seriously triggering its thumb impression on one's mental health during the present Covid crisis.

Accreditation and regulation

Regulatory measures like licensing, pollution control, biomedical waste management, etc., are being strengthened for providing healthcare and diagnostic services. Even small diagnostic service providers are aware and are keen to obtain accreditation such as NABH, NABL, ISO, CAP, etc.

Diagnostic services

Covid-19 has significantly impacted the health services including diagnostics. Awareness has significantly reduced the alarming spread of contagious pandemic through constant broadcast and massive preventive measures. The demand for diagnostic services has reached new heights and it is met by growth of laboratories with arrival of new techniques and technologies, enabling to meet the crisis more efficiently.

Research and development

The timely vaccinations and effective medications like Covishield, Covaxin, etc., through research and development have helped the world to prevent and recover from such catastrophic disaster.

Growth in molecular diagnostics has reached its pinnacle like never before and the research and development is constantly emerging in the look out to always outsmart the present existing techniques and technologies. Hence, many landmarks are waiting to unleash in the near future.

Digital transformation

The digital platforms like online booking have contributed in the prevention of mass gathering and hence helped the spread of pandemic world over. The availability of online booking has enabled booking appointments and reduced physical payments by digital transfer and hence this digital transformation has become a game changer in significantly reducing the incidence of Covid cases.

Public awareness and healthcare has stood up to the occasion with its previous encounter experiences in the past and with latest technological advancements like internet and smart phone gadgets. A remarkable impact has been achieved and is constantly on the radar for any emergency crisis to tackle effectively and efficiently like never before.

Impact on family and children

In many families, children are affected much more than other age groups. Considerable numbers of children have lost their parents during this pandemic though it is proportionally low. National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has told the Supreme Court that around 1.5 lakh children are now in need of care and protection after losing at least one of their parents. Over 10,000 of these 1.5 lakh children have lost both parents, the NCPCR informed the apex court.

Livelihood of many families has got affected to a very large extent due to Covid containment measures, and businesses affected severely irrespective of their size and revenue.

Outlook

It is certainly true that there are a lot more positives emerging out of the crisis in each sector, in spite of negative influences and some shortcomings, the setbacks too cannot be ignored or ruled out. RT Diagnostics till date has contributed in every possible way. ●

