

Combating Pandemics: Role of Global Cooperation

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Synopsis

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 across the world, it has come to the attention of the masses that fighting pandemic is a common and collective challenge not only for the governments across the borders, but also for the entire humanity to have a collective response endorsed by the international community. While one may argue on the merits of a collective response, one must understand that pandemic of this sort would spread regardless of differences in the governance system or border policies, race or political ideology. While a country may make significant progress in its valiant efforts to prevent a pandemic, there is little a nation can do on its own to prevent it spreading across the borders. On that account, communication and cooperation on a global scale is the only apparent solution that may help to limit the spread of an epidemic and even possibly eliminate it. Countries taking an active interest in hoarding resource, collecting and analyzing intelligence and sharing information can create a ground for cooperation.

Research and Capacity Building

The World Health Organization (WHO) has repeatedly stressed upon global unity and cooperation, referring it as the 'key' to fight against the epidemic. Major international conclave(s) on building a rudimentary framework for epidemic or pandemic is pivotal in addressing an outbreak. In the conclave, countries that accumulated a lot of useful experience and practice during a pandemic in recently, need to share them with the rest of the world, in order to formulate best practices and preventive measures. Establishing collaboration among government entities, clinicians and tech entrepreneurs can lead to a breeding ground of using AI (Artificial Intelligence) on humanitarian issues. For instance, China, while responding to the virus by optimizing on its strong technology sector and focused specifically artificial intelligence (AI), data science, and technology to track and fight the pandemic. AI can help to identify, detect and forecast outbreaks. Canadian startup BlueDot data intelligence warned about the threat

several days before the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the World Health Organization issued their public warnings. AI can also contribute to help diagnose a virus, to deliver medical, food and other necessary supplies with drones during pandemics also to quicken the development of a vaccination for a virus. Therefore, optimization of Artificial intelligence can help mankind to undertake both preventive, precautionary as well as damage control measures.

Marie-Paule Kieny, Director of Research at INSERM and co-chair of IVTF, said, “Times of crisis present the opportunity to focus capabilities and energy on solving important problems”. A strong clinical research capacity is the only possible way to prevent any further outbreak and challenges are addressed with less knowledge gap than before. Strengthening research capacity to prevent pandemics demands both political support and a structured financial system. Respective governments, researchers and other regulatory bodies must collaborate in building up a robust research and development (R&D) system. The current kits that are used to test COVID-19 are configured more for a research lab than a hospital, as we know, turned out to be a big challenge for labs with less capacity. Thus, partnership between local health departments, public health laboratories and private companies can make it seemingly possible to develop a well-built capacity for research that can be mobilized quickly when needed.

Accessibility

Pandemics do not follow the course of geographic borders. The degree of spreading is very hard to anticipated and beyond any geographic perimeter. However, the most common ground lies in the fact that all the countries experiencing a pandemic do not have necessary capabilities to combat against it. Setting up an international fund, especially for developing countries with limited resources so that they can upgrade their healthcare system and capacity is prerequisite in terms of tackling any abrupt situation. Training on pandemic surveillance, Infection Prevention and Control (IPC), and clinical management access should be given to health and medical staff so that they can work with better credibility to prevent pandemic casualties. Citizens from all societal classes must have access to essential medication during crisis-situation. It is also mandatory to invest in public health sectors with capacity building campaigns and adequate financing.

Awareness

Citizens along with the government have their fair share of moral obligations as well. Hence, an orderly flow of information, enhanced communication, guideline and awareness among the citizens is required to mobilize the mass people. It is necessary to build up an early warning system on 'pandemic preparedness' at a global scale with a comprehensive framework which will educate people regarding hygiene, social isolation etc. Besides, a universal travelling guideline with strict norms and regulations can be very critical to the mitigation of pandemic impact. Addressing the pandemic situation, citizens all around the world must limit their movement and follow the international travel guidelines. Psychological repercussions on population in isolation are highly conceivable in the time of pandemics. Access to the internet is easy and at times the only medium to stay connected to the global update during a pandemic. Any kind of misinformation or fake news among the population may terrorize people in general. Instead, a strong awareness system should be built that can be promoted through the internet as well as on the field. Mass population and the administration must work as a team to counter pandemics hence providing citizens with early warning about impacts and to dos regarding the epidemic is of paramount importance.

During an outbreak of a disease, the response needs to be quick and immediate. Hence, short term implementation protocols and plans are necessary to address the crucial situation of a pandemic. Immediate deployment of EMTs (emergency medical team), forming a collective body of medical experts, a technical committee and a medical response team are few of the short-term strategies that respective governments need to enact. Other medical supplies for treatment purposes are also very crucial. For example, at the initial stage of the epidemic prevention and control of COVID-19, China experienced a shortage of medical supplies such as masks and detection kits. With the proper supplies, China could have possibly saved more lives.

State governments must possess the capacity to absorb theunprecedented financial shock with sufficient backup during pandemic. Also, spontaneous fundraising (for emergency bill) by governments is substantial in the time of a pandemic. At a global scale, this will help countries will fewer resources to resist casualties and financial shocks in different sectors.As a matter of fact, Italy with a high death toll, lamented that "not a single EU country" has responded to its

request for medical equipment in the wake of coronavirus unlike China, which immediately helped.

NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and other social welfare organizations collaborating with the government can greatly contribute to the mobilization of manpower at the critical time of a pandemic specially in places like refugee camps where the risk of people getting affected is high due to the congested living condition. NGOs and UN agencies are currently working closely with the government of Bangladesh on the preparedness and response in Rohingya camps over the coronavirus outbreak.

During a pandemic, doctors and other health care professionals working under EMTs (Emergency Medical Team) and in hospitals need to be provided with sufficient Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), repellent surgical masks, face visors, respirator masks etc to stop community transmission. Lack of protective gear can highly risk the environment for medical experts to accord treatment. In fact, Health workers are more prone to get affected as they may be exposed to higher doses of the virus. Dr Nishant Joshi, a doctor who works in A&E at Luton and Dunstable general hospital, England told the BBC's Emma Barnett show: "We're fighting an invisible enemy, blindfolded, with both hands tied behind our backs and healthcare workers are at grave risk" referring to the treatment of patients with COVID-19. Frontline doctors in Australia also reported about the massive shortage in supplies that pushed them to treat the patients with zero safeguard. As part of the emergency response to the outbreak of a pandemic, the duty of respective governments' is to have enough stockpiles to compensate every possible emergency requisition by the doctors, nurses and other staff.

Due to the outbreak of coronavirus, the advice about self-quarantining and other practices of isolation has created a challenge for organizations in managing their employees. Working from home policy is yet applicable mostly for white collar jobs. For the rest of the working class the policy is still vague. A global poll from 2018 by data and insights company Kantar found that of 33,000 people, 32% valued a job where they could work from home. However, the outbreak of coronavirus seemingly can be a wake-up call for setting up a universal obliging work from home policy by developing cheaper and more widely accessible video-conferencing technology along with other collaboration tools.

Outbreak of COVID-19 simply underscores that cooperation in the research field, medical system and assistance, cooperation between private and public sectors, intelligence collection, collaboration between international organizations and respective state governments are all essential to form an effective prevention and control system. Effective social distancing techniques, spontaneous and voluntary information, experience and knowledge sharing take wide-ranging universal cooperation. Lessons should be learned from major challenges in countering epidemics by global health emergency cooperation and improved coordination must be established to set up an advanced international body to fight off this fatal pandemic.

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