

# How India Delivers Healthcare to 1.3 billion citizens

ABLE has been facilitating few India related sessions on biotechnology and healthcare at the annual international convention organized by the Biotechnology Innovation Organization(BIO) of the US. This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the BIO annual conference, turned in to a virtual event, BIO DIGITAL US and several sessions were held online on the original conference dates, June 8-11, 2020.

ABLE facilitated an India related session,  
**"The Lure of Universal Healthcare! What India is doing in Healthcare"**  
**BIO DIGITAL US | June 8-12, 2020**

The session was moderated by Dr Stephen Sammut, Healthcare Fellow at the Wharton School of Management, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia

## The Panelists were:

- ◆ Ms Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, Chairperson & MD, Biocon Limited
- ◆ Dr Indu Bhushan, CEO, Ayushman Bharat
- ◆ Dr Amit Kapoor, Chair, Institute of Competitiveness
- ◆ Dr Devi Prasad Shetty, Chairman & Executive Director, Narayana Health

Thousands of delegates from all over the world logged in to the BIO Digital conference sessions.

We are presenting below the edited excerpts from the India-related session. The recorded version of the session is also available online. Please click the link below to the recorded panel discussion...

**Dr Indu Bhushan** explained India's strategy focusing on Ayushman Bharat's mission structure, resources and services and also reflect upon the role that Ayushman Bharat has in addressing and alleviating some other threats associated with Covid 19.

Dr Bhushan said,

- India can be proud of many achievements in the health sector including eradication of polio and reducing communicable diseases in a big way.
- One area where we still find a challenge is health financing. India spends about 1.2% of GDP on health through government channels which is one of the lowest in the world. It places us among the bottom 10 countries in the world and one direct offshoot of the expenditure on health is that much of the expenditure comes from the people themselves. So out of pocket expenditure is very high and of about 62-65% of total expenditure on health comes out of pocket. The out of pocket expenditure is not efficient because it is regressive and poor families find it more difficult to spend that kind of money and some studies have shown that 60 million families or people go into poverty because of expenditure on health."
- Two years ago, the Prime Minister of India Mr Modi had the vision of Ayushman Bharat.
- Ayushman Bharat has two legs. One is strengthening of Primary Health Care system and there is a plan for putting in place 1,50,000 Health and Wellness centres and these centres will cover the population of about 10,000 people each and provide a series of Primary Health care services better than today.

- The second leg is the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana supporting a hospitalization care for secondary and tertiary level and the idea is to provide insurance coverage of about \$7,000 ( Rs 500,000 )for each family every year, covering 100 million families which is more than 500 million people.
- This scheme was launched in 2018, about 18 months ago and we completed 10 million treatments under under this scheme right now covering 32 states out of 36 States and Union Territories.
- One of the key features of this scheme is the strong IT platform of identifying beneficiaries out of 500 people connecting them to 22,000 hospitals and 32 states and UTs providing end-to-end services in paperless manner.
- During the covid-19, a large amount of data was collected. Not only there is background data of 500 million people but also the treatment details of 10 million people.
- Also with the help of this scheme it is easy to monitor and see where the highlighted cases are coming up and those hotspots become leading indicators for Covid and then information is provided to the surveillance teams to take early action in terms of tracing and providing early treatment and testing.
- This infrastructure has not only helped in terms of providing treatment to poor people all over the country but also has helped in terms of putting in place strong Covid responses.

**Dr Amit Kapoor** explained the aspects of Universal Health Care (UHC) in the global competitiveness perspective for India's economy and accompanying social impact contrasting the current global situation for Covid 19 with the Indian experience. Different approaches in selected states in India. His emphasis was on the inter-relationship of UHC in those states with public health and primary care access.

Dr Kapoor said,

- There are many things that have been done with the UHC scheme.
- We need to look into two things. How does our country look after Economic and Social Development.
- Regarding Covid 19 there has been a huge movement in terms of infection rates across the world but in India, there is a stunning slowdown happened around the last 8-10 weeks.
- Healthcare infrastructure has been managed very well in India.
- Vulnerability in Indian states has been observed about Health infrastructure, Population demographics and the underlined health issues.
- States most vulnerable to the Coronavirus have not seen high level of infection rate. Maybe due to the management which handled it very well on the ground and the healthcare system was good.
- Every healthcare system that is created has a positive economy outcome.
- India needs to now follow certain strategies. One of them is larger testing which will help us to identify the asymptomatic patient population better.
- The most important thing that we need to look at the economic cost of Covid 19.

**Dr Devi Prasad Shetty** explained the impact of UHC on healthcare providers in India in terms of benefits and challenges to the population and provider organizations. He described the clinical strategy of managing Covid 19 and the impact it has had for the providers in India.

Dr Shetty said,

- Surgery is the orphan child of public health system in most of the developing countries.
- Most of the developing countries spend a huge amount of money on Malaria, TB and HIV.
- These diseases annually kills less than 3.5 million people across the world but lack of access to safe surgery kills 17 million people.
- If the policy of the country is geared towards building infrastructure for surgery, this infrastructure can easily tackle such diseases at a tiny cost. But unfortunately, policy makers fail to understand the importance of surgery as the pillar of transforming healthcare of the nation.
- India requires 65 million surgeries a year but unfortunately, India is doing only 26 million surgeries a year. By sponsoring surgeries, when the infrastructure comes up, most of the problems can be managed very efficiently.
- India is having a tradition of Universal Health Insurance since past many years.
- 16 years ago, Karnataka launched a micro health insurance with a premium of 11 cents a month and 4 million people agreed to pay the money to Karnataka Cooperative Society and at the end of 12 years over 1.3 million people had surgical treatments and 130,000 people had a heart operation.
- India is an amazing country where dramatic things happen in a very short period of time.
- 2 months back when COVID-19 broke out in India, there were only 3 companies making PPE (personal protection equipment) Today we have over 100 companies making PPEs.
- 2 months ago, company had less than 40,000 ventilators. Today we have over 200,000 ventilators. Soon we will be able to export ventilators to any part of the world.
- The major security risk in India is the shortage of skilled manpower that is better in other developed countries. The government policies for medical education has to change.
- A global requirement of 80 million healthcare workforce shortage is likely to happen in the next 12 years.
- Unless we produce many doctors, nurses and medical technicians, we will be under great threat. And such pandemics might happen again. The only way to prepare ourselves is to have skilled human resources in the healthcare sector.

**Dr Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw** highlighted the role of the private sector in addressing the needs of people and also the role of innovation and delivery of needed products and specifically the medicinal challenges of COVID-19.

Dr Mazumdar-Shaw said:

- The challenges in terms of financing healthcare has bankrupted many families in the country.
- Combining technology and combining preventive and the tertiary healthcare model is what will actually deliver on the goal of healthcare and that is going to be a tremendous economic growth driver because as the health of the country improves, the economic growth will also benefit greatly from better health indicators.
- The covid crisis has brought to light a number of interventions that the health management system was able to quickly respond to in the country. India was very quick to impose a lockdown and was able to stop the spread of the covid 19 and India has started a calibrated opening up of the economy despite daily increase in COVID-19 infection rates.

- The management of this disease has been very well done largely because there was a very thoughtful approach by the government and having the state level planning as well.
- India is the largest producer of vaccines in the world by volume and also the largest producer of generic drugs in the world.
- India provided the world with hydroxychloroquine drug,,one of the probable prophylactic for Covid 19.
- From testing point of view, in the early stages India was dependant on imported testing kits. In a very short time, four or five kit assemblers came out with these kits. And these kits now are able to test over 200,000 tests a day which was earlier at about only 10,000 tests a day. India is also conducting serological tests which will be able to give us sero prevalence in various parts of the country. This is going to be very important for surveillance and managing the disease as we lift the lockdown.
- The huge availability of software capability in India is great with the help of each we can do contact tracing through apps.
- Government has come with an app called the Arogya Setu which traces people whom you have been in contact with and gives information of how many people have got Covid 19 within 500m, 1km, 2km, 5km radius of a person.
- Interesting combination of technology and medicine and manufacturing to deal with the pandemic.
- The biggest outbreak is in the city of Mumbai where the world's largest slum exist which is of about 2.5km radius with 850,000 people residing in there. It is difficult to impose social distancing there.
- India as a country and the world at large recognizes the importance of public health and having a robust primary healthcare centre.
- This is a great partnership between the private and public healthcare system because without this partnership it will be difficult to deliver healthcare in an effective, efficient and affordable manner.

#### **Discussion in four broad categories:**

- **Universal healthcare and primary care impact on pandemic response**
- **Pace of UHC adoption in India**
- **Impact of UHC on the Indian economy and competitiveness**
- **Reflections on India and UHC after Covid 19**

#### **Dr Shetty stated,**

- Other countries have done better than India in primary healthcare
- The difference is if India allows nursing practitioners to prescribe 47 basic drugs then we will be able to transform rural healthcare with no additional investment.
- All it requires is the regulatory change permitting the nurse practitioners who have undergone structured training.
- This will be a game changer mainly because these 47 drugs are basic drugs which are already dispensed by a group of people called QUACKS(unqualified medical practitioners) in India. By having a qualified person who knows the limitations, importance and the side effects of the drug, we will be able to penetrate to the rural areas as we have a phenomenal network of primary health sectors across the country.

- Telemedicine, which is legalised by a policy change by the medical council of India recently, 100,000 and more of villagers are accessing specialists from their bedroom.
- Due to Covid, we can see a least 500 patients from remote locations of India using telemedicine.
- But to culminate this is great impact in rural India, we need to have someone who can prescribe.

**Dr Bhushan stated,**

- Strong primary healthcare is important and critical for dealing with a crisis like this.
- Primary healthcare wouldn't stop the transmission of the disease but would help in tracing people early and ensuring that they get timely treatment and reducing mortality.
- Ayushman Bharat will strengthen the primary healthcare.

**Dr Kapoor stated,**

- To see a whole new positive impact on people who are a part of this scheme
- Multiplier of healthcare can be close to around 25% of the GDP for any kind of a country.
- The cost of the government is minimalistic but the benefit to the economy is close to about \$13,000 over a period of a person's lifetime which is a huge aggregated effect and a huge saving.
- There is a larger challenge that we need to look at is to how do we invest in infrastructure over a period of time.
- India requires around \$245 billion investment within the healthcare system.
- Enterprises can also be a part of this.
- Cleanliness, sanitization and healthy lifestyle needs to be added in every lifestyle which is the most important part of the nutrition. This will help to impact the economy as a whole.

**Dr Mazumdar-Shaw stated,**

- India is in a very good state of preparedness when it comes to catering to the drugs and vaccines needs of the country.
- The healthcare workers, ASHA workers have helped to manage the disease in a very significant way by reaching door-to-door for tracing the disease. And this methodology India has adopted for many diseases.
- Through this we have done many technology led initiatives.
- Indian industry has looked upon Ayushman Bharat as a huge opportunity for Indian manufacturers to expand their market opportunity.
- Apart from covid vaccines, we also immunise the population against many other kinds of pandemics and infectious diseases.
- Both generic drugs as well as vaccines, India is in a state of readiness and preparedness and has the global scale capacities.
- Covid has thrown up huge levels of innovation. This is the time of investing in such global scales.