

Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Global Health: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19, which appeared in Wuhan in China in late December 2019, is having a dreadful impact on global health. The disease has been adversely affecting global health systems in addition to the nervousness it has created on socioeconomic, political and other spheres. In early January 2020, it kicked off as a disease with the typical symptoms of a flu affecting a small chunk of the population in China, but there have been around 3.4 million reported cases within the last four months.

Keywords: Coronavirus; COVID-19; Global health; Disease; Socioeconomic

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19, which appeared in Wuhan in China in late December 2019, is having a dreadful impact on global health. The disease has been adversely affecting global health systems in addition to the nervousness it has created on socioeconomic, political and other spheres. In early January 2020, it kicked off as a disease with the typical symptoms of a flu affecting a small chunk of the population in China, but there has been around 3.4 million reported cases within the last four months. The numbers of deaths have grown from less than 1000 to over 245,000 within the last 3.5 months. There has also been a serious reservation around under-reporting of COVID-19 from many developing countries which means the actual number of people infected by COVID-19 could be up to 60% more than what has been currently reported in certain countries.

The “Growth Factor” for COVID-19 (every days new deaths/new deaths on the previous day) has grown from 2 in early January 2020 to over 30 by the end of January 2020, and is now coming down to 2. However, the disease will not be under control until the Growth Factor is below 1. The severity of spread, the number of deaths and the number of new infections each day has sent shock-waves throughout the world leading to the current lockdown in almost all the countries affected by COVID-19-around 210 countries. What is even more worrying is that there is no consensus on treatment or vaccine available at our disposal. The first case of death due to COVID-19 outside China was reported in early January this year and by the 30th of January 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a “Public Health Emergency”. As we have seen, both developing and developed countries have been struggling to get the virus under control. A lot of anti-viral drugs

have been tried but until today an agreed protocol for treatment has not been communicated. Amidst all of these, the WHO has led a “solidarity clinical trial” with its partners and various national governments and I am hopeful that there will be treatment followed by vaccines available within a few months.

COVID-19 has changed the global health priorities, for instance, at least 100 million children who would need vaccinations for measles, polio etc may not have access to vaccines for the next several months. As the virus is also targeting healthcare professionals, the long term impact of the virus on the healthcare sector will need serious research and guidance. Whilst most countries are injecting funds to manage COVID-19, it is quite obvious that these funds are diverted from other health and development programs/projects, which could have a detrimental effect in the long term.

Social media has been a powerful and useful tool in communicating the relevant information on COVID-19; however it’s important to note that over 3.5 billion people across the world don’t have access to internet so several national governments will have to find strategic ways to share information to support their people. With the economy slowed down there will be limited investments in the international development at least for the next several months which will in turn have a not-so-positive impact on various global health interventions.

The way forward is to prevent, treat, trace and quarantine. Clinical trials and investments in research will have to be augmented. It is important for the global community to create a “New International Fund with New Money” to address COVID-19’s short term and long term adverse effects. WHO and World Trade Organization

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(WTO) will have to work closely with various stakeholders to reduce trade barriers to strengthen the supply-chain management of required medicines and vaccines to contain COVID-19. With our joint efforts, I am confident that the Coronavirus disease will

be under control.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.