

Making preparations for handling the next pandemic

"The best way of ending restrictions and easing their economic effects is to attack the #coronavirus with an aggressive and comprehensive package of measures. Countries must find, test, isolate and treat every #COVID19 case and trace every contact."

- Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus,
Director General of World Health Organization,
Apr 4, 2020.^[1]

Dear Editor,

Raina states that the strategy for training in public health and community medicine without training of precautionary principles is incomplete in his Editorial published in the October 2022 issue of the Journal.^[2] Therein, he enlists shortcomings of our present system of assessment and management of disease-control exercise. Thereafter, he mentions future directions which may strengthen us in our collective efforts to hold the spread of the contagion. What the medical trainers should plan ahead, what went wrong, and what the practitioners should do is the theme of the article, and I agree with all the points raised by the writer. Nevertheless, we need to realise that while dealing with such a massive challenge, all the wings of the Government should come on the same page – not just the healthcare department – and should work in tandem.

There are divisions of the administration for proper implementation of public service provision, and that system is placed there for smooth running of various functions. But if all the arms do not move well and in cohesion, chinks may appear in our armour and our protective shield may get broken. At the beginning of the pandemic, we saw various religious gatherings and these went on despite warnings issued by various experts.^[3] Hence, whatever we do downstream such events, it may have only a limited impact. Hence, healthcare planners should be given proper attention and their premonition should be respected. The author highlights failure of public health/community medicine, but the fact of the matter is that if our policy makers do not lend an ear to them, it is naïve to emphasise it as a failure of theirs alone.

Besides that, the author underscores our obsession with the sample size and sampling method. While many a time studying a small part of a population helps us to decipher larger undercurrents in a simpler way, the technique may not be of help and may be misleading, which is a known fact now. The author correctly underlines the truth in this regard. Nevertheless, what also should be understood is that all of

us are trained to make sense of the world in this way by our masters.

When rules of the National Medical Commission make it compulsory to do only certain types of research, promote a certain line of thinking, reward a specific type of planning, and focus on one individual aspect to explore the world around us, it should come as no surprise when *all* of us fail to grasp enormity of a new challenge.^[4] In this background, it is inappropriate to put the onus on the weakest part of the chain – the persons at the bottom of the hierarchy – while not thinking about the process itself. Our higher regulatory bodies should promote all types of research so that we can process and interpret every type of information in every possible manner. In lieu of that, when we think in a well-trained (read orthodox) way, we may again miss our next pandemic in its early stage.

Just to cite one example of the absurdity here, if a young researcher in her early career reports the first case of a new disease, she does not get any credit for her novel discovery as per prevalent rules of the Commission as that is a Case Report. Therefore, who will take the risk to conduct some really challenging exercise! On the other hand, when one reports 10 cases of a disease which has been known for ages, one gets credit, even when there is nothing novel here, as that constitutes a Case Series. As a human being, I believe thinking is the modality gifted to us for making this world beautiful. When we start to outsource the job of our greatest gift, we blindfold ourselves.

Under the heading, 'Why train for the pandemic', the author provides an analogy of *global financial crisis of 2008*. As stock markets crashed around the world then, it is an example of the troubles of our interconnected world. But we should also analyse that the crisis was man-made and a celebrated economist predicted it.^[5] Conversely, as the COVID-19 pandemic neither is a deliberate act nor was predictable, I think we should revise our position on this aspect.

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