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Indian Pharma Industry's response to the pandemic and outlook for the new year

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The pandemic continues to be a challenging humanitarian crisis globally with the [Omicron](#) variant sparking new fears. With the population facing a risk to their lives and livelihood, an estimated 300 million lives have been impacted and over 5 million casualties around the world by COVID-19. With over 34.7 million cases in the country, and 0.4 million people dead, there is hardly a family to have left unscathed by the virus.

The challenges have been equally tough for the healthcare and [pharma](#) industry, which have been at the forefront of the pandemic's demands. While COVID exposed the multiple infrastructural gaps and vulnerabilities, it has also acted as the harbinger of change. The adversities and challenges offered the sector a chance to transform and modernize to cater the needs of population. In a year's time, multiple vaccines and therapies are being rolled out, which has never



happened before. It is an example of how integrated efforts and collaboration between several stakeholders can make a difference to meet the challenges.

Coping with the challenges and expectations of the pandemic: The year that has been

While the pandemic posed several new challenges, Indian pharma industry emerged as a reliable supplier of high-quality,

affordable medicines by demonstrating its commitment towards continuous supply of medicines across the countries. Nonetheless, there have been significant learning for the industry. From increased production to digitization, the sector has been able to meet the supply of medicines in difficult and unprecedented times.

1. Collaboration

Collaboration between government, industry and all stakeholders has been the key to meet the dynamic situation of the pandemic. Agility has been the hallmark with increased digitalization and communication has helped the production and supply chain to respond to the needs of pandemic. This has been both inside the companies and with external environment. The last twenty months has seen rapid adoption of technology which helped the organizations to be resilient and adaptable. Regular feedback, integrated efforts, sharing and consistent dialogue between industry stakeholders and government authorities has worked well during COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Resilient Supply Chains

During the COVID 19 pandemic, the Indian pharmaceutical industry has been ensuring that there is uninterrupted supply of medicines to patients across the world. Companies ramped up production capacity of COVID treatment medicines to vaccines. Significant steps are being taken by the government to bolster India's image as the 'pharmacy' of the world and solve challenges related to manufacturing and supply chain. The Government announced Production Linked Incentive Scheme for APIs/KSMs and formulations to boost self-reliance and create global champions out of India. The pandemic highlighted the importance of a diverse and resilient supply chain and the potential challenges of heavy reliance

on single source.

1. Digitalization

COVID-19 created significant disruptions across value chain and increased thrust on digitalization and skill-set upgradation. The use of the CoWin platform, Arogya Setu and digitized healthcare platforms are the steps in the right direction to create databases for better healthcare delivery systems. Teams in companies collaborated internally, made use of the databases to evaluate demand patterns and adapt accordingly.

The pharmaceutical companies undertook several digitalization initiatives including predictive data analytics, process simplification, asset performance and automation and data-driven decision making to stay ahead of the curve. This has helped the industry to remain not only resilient in production and supplying medicines but has provided impetus towards using innovative ideas in implementation of drug delivery system.

1. Emergency Use Authorization and Voluntary Licensing

The regulatory simplification, emergency use authorization (EUA) and voluntary licensing has helped in introducing vaccines, therapeutics and hold promise for speedier developments of medicines in the future. Several Indian companies partnered with global manufacturers to endeavour better accessibility of essential drugs for treating COVID-19 such as Molnupiravir, among others. In vaccines, excellent examples of collaboration are being witnessed - collaboration of AstraZeneca- Serum Institute in India, Dr Reddy's with RDIF and The Gamaleya Center for marketing and distribution of Sputnik and Biological E with Johnson and Johnson. Besides, Bharat Biotech and Zydus Cadila have offered indigenous vaccine to India. In fact, Zydus vaccines is the first DNA based vaccine and will soon be administered to both adults and children. The EUA plays an important role in mobilizing COVID-19 vaccines as promising new tools in a rapidly unfolding public crisis.

1. Safety of Employees, Remote Work Flexibility and Connectivity

From the beginning of the pandemic, the pharma companies have been consistently working on the safety of employees engaged in the manufacturing of pharmaceutical products. Safety protocol documents were prepared and provided a comprehensive set of practices that have been deployed across pharmaceutical manufacturing companies in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic placed flexible work arrangements, especially remote work, in the spotlight. Companies that modernized their infrastructures and trained their people transitioned to remote work quickly, without compromising security, have

already seen positive results of the remote work arrangements. Even post the pandemic, flexible work arrangements will improve recruitment and retention efforts, augment organizational diversity efforts, and help the organization's efforts to be socially responsible. In the increasing digital era, companies are also focusing on assessing security and control gaps to stop cybercriminal activities.

What the future looks like for the pharma market: Learnings going forward

The COVID 19 pandemic has offered opportunity to the industry to look beyond transitional issues and to make a difference to fulfil needs of billions across the world. Vaccine/medicine inequality remains a big issue. There is a dire need to close the gap, since viruses and communicable diseases do not differentiate geographically, and help needs to reach everyone in an equitable manner.

The coronavirus has highlighted that no one's safe until everyone's safe. There is a need to democratize healthcare further to meet the needs of patients in India and across the world. The compelling need for quality healthcare, lifesaving drugs and preventive care will provide space for post-pandemic pharma market, along with better, faster adoption of technologies. Accelerating growth and streamlining supply chain management will help the pharma sector to thrive.

The vision of the industry is to achieve the turnover of over \$120-130Bn by 2030 from current revenues of \$44 Bn recording a double digit growth during this decade. The pharma sector is strategic and has both reach and scale. For long term growth, the industry will need to focus on increased thrust on R&D and Innovation, self-reliance in API, upgrading quality standards, increased digitization, regulatory simplification and increased thrust towards exports. The Vision 2030 will make the industry the largest in the world in terms of volume and among Top 5 in terms of value in the coming decade. The industry is committed to move up the value chain to 'Make and Discover in India' from 'Make in India'.

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