Review Article

Post COVID strategic transformation in Pharmaceutical Practices: A boon or a bane

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Abstract

Covid-19 pandemic has left a devastating impact on the human fraternity globally. It was an extempore test posed by the dreadful virus. Undoubtedly, all the commercial sectors and the sections of the society have been affected. Human race has been compelled to transform and re strategize. Enhanced pharma production, increased market influx, supply chain disruption, vaccine development etc were some of the key activities of that challenging time. The lessons learnt and the experiences gained could be used to re strategize for better tomorrow.

Keywords: Covid-19, pharmaceutical, strategic transformation, health

Introduction

Covid-19 crawled out to abruptly engulf the entire world and leave behind a devastating impact on the human fraternity globally with millions of deaths all around. The dreadful virus posed an extempore test for mankind with respect to the social, health, medical, economical, behavioral, commercial, educational and technical fitness and preparedness. Almost all the sections of society and the commercial sectors were afflicted. In those days of crisis, people looked helplessly especially towards the health and pharma sectors, and the scientific fraternity to come to their rescue. With volume of adversaries, trio of health, pharma and scientific fraternity virtually ran a race against time to evolve soothing solutions. Human race has been compelled to transform and re strategize to align with the similar uncalled threats in future. The reports documented that there was increase in pharmaceutical manufacturing. Subsequently, the influx of healthcare products into the market also saw rising trends. For example the prime focus on basic hand hygiene and sanitization led to the growth of hand sanitizer market (Globe Newswire, 2021). Similar trends were cited for certain other pharmaceutical products. Individually, the performance of different pharmaceutical industry showed variable impacts (Behera and Rath, 2021). Literature has also cited the shortage of drug supply in India during Covid 19 owing to various reasons (Dapke et al., 2021). Globally, a number of healthcare transformations like e-health tools, online therapy and contact less distribution were practiced (Jazieh and Kozlakidis, 2020). A variety of such altered arrangements were made during the pandemic. The present write up attempts to highlight some of the key transformations observed in Pharmaceutical practices during Covid 19 and their possible post covid era impacts.

Pharmaceutical Industry: COVID 19 scenario

The unprecedented onset of Covid 19 waves brought in multiple challenges to the pharmaceutical and healthcare industry. There was increased demand of various medicaments, protective gears and diagnostic testing facilities (Peeri et al., 2020). With prime focus on basic hygiene and sanitization, the use of hand sanitizer had increased immensely. It has been documented that due to lethal nature of covid infection and no proven anti covid therapeutic agent available; and its apprehended association with bacterial super infections led to the increase in antimicrobials, antiviral, antiprotozoal, nutraceuticals and multivitamins prescriptions (Rawson et

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al., 2021; Rodríguez-Álvarez et al., 2021; Charan et al., 2021; Charan et al., 2021; Dutta et al., 2021; Kaur et al., 2020; Samad et al., 2021; Samad et al., 2021). As per reports, self medication and consequently the purchase of over the counter medicines from local pharmacists were also prompted due to the shut downs etc. Approximately, 34% gross prevalence of self-medication to prevent COVID-19, with highest value for vitamin C (27.6%) followed by chloroquine/ hydroxychloroquine (2%) and azithromycin (1.2%) were reported (Sadio et al., 2021). As per the available literature, mainly pain killers, antipyretics, cough relievers, antidiarrheals, calcium and vitamin supplements, sleep medications, antimicrobials, herbal and homeopathic formulations were self-prescribed. It was estimated that worldwide, the maximum purchase of antibiotics from the local pharmacist arose to the tune of around 81%. Hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine were also used as self-medicaments (Abena et al., 2020; Godman, 2020; Gautret et al., 2020; Sefah et al., 2021; Chauhan et al., 2020). In a study carried out in an Indian city, the self-medication with antimicrobials like azithromycin and doxycycline during recent pandemic was quoted to be around 54% and 40% respectively as compared to the pre-pandemic time values of 21% and 25% respectively (Chouduri et al., 2018; Nasir et al., 2020). It was interesting to note that around half of the pharmacies accounted less than 25% increase in the sale of azithromycin. The sale of Vitamin C was reported to increase by more than 75% by around 40% of pharmacies as compared to the previous years.

Undoubtedly, there was an abruptly increased market influx of various healthcare medicaments which posed an unprecedented challenge for industries. The reliability on the outside market for the active pharmaceutical ingredients along with the strict covid 19 protocols acted as a trigger for insufficient supplies of the active pharmaceutical ingredients (API). This adversely affected a number of pharmaceutical industry, however the industry with prior stockpiles were reported to have very high price tags (Sarkees et al., 2020). Besides this, the makeshift arrangements, insufficient healthcare infrastructure and resources, and substantial shortages of essential equipment (e.g., ICU beds and ventilators), diagnostic tests, medical supplies (masks, sanitizers, including personal protective equipment, etc.), medicines etc further added to the menace erupted due to the dreadful virus.

Pharmaceutical Industry: Strategic transformation

Covid 19 pandemic era has seen multiple non apprehended transformations. The disaster proved to be a gateway to digital innovations and technologies in healthcare sector, medical education and work from home communications. Telecommunication and telemedicine has been widely practiced during this pandemic (Malani et al., 2020). Pharmaceutical industries have seen significant impact during this period. The period reported changes in the demand, revision of regulations, and curtailment of span for research and development activity and relevant approvals. This period is said to have experienced unprecedented slowdowns, especially in non Covid related illnesses and subsequent remedies (Ayati et al., 2020). The world has witnessed successful real-world data generation related to clinical practice, educational gaps and perspectives of healthcare professionals by employing digital tools like SurveyMonkey (Morrison et al., 2021; Robbins et al., 2020; Vilovic et al., 2021; Kidd et al., 2021). As documented elsewhere also, world could highly appreciate the scope for interactions with stakeholders, health institutions, subject experts, vaccine launch and roll out, patient enrolment, digitalization of site selection and remote monitoring methods for execution of the real world data generation during this difficult time (Mah et al., 2020). Above all, the entire population on the globe has seen the biggest strategic transformation in the form of successful covid 19 vaccine development and its efficacious roll out for mass coverage in such a short period. Here the successful vaccine coverage using CoWIN platform in India could be well applauded.

Pharmaceutical Industry: Post Covid Impacts

The supply chain disruption could be thought of one key factor in shortage of manufacturing and influx of finished products in the market. Authors have documented the need to stress test the supply chains on new performance measures like resilience, responsiveness and re - configurability (Sharma et al., 2021). It has been suggested that the industries need to diversify the supply chains with special consideration on geographic perspective so as to further mitigate the possible risks related to supplies from one specific region or the country. Further, the self reliant local manufacturers along with a positive approach to alternative strategies could be a boon in adversaries (Downtoearth.org.in, 2020). The promotion of domestic bulk drug parks has been envisaged as a welcome initiative to counter any such forth coming challenges. Besides this, it has been documented that many other strategic designs such as remote working options, tackling high absenteeism and the evolving promising financial risk management frameworks have been suggested as some of the important steps which could be handy in building a resilient network for logistics supply chain (GEP, 2020; Zanders Treasury & Finance Solutions, 2020). The need to facilitate new study proposals to repurpose and investigate potential drug effects for Covid-19 patients has also been stressed.

Conclusion

Enhanced manufacturing, minimal staff, online mode for instructions, boom to antibiotic production, antipyretics, anti inflammatory, steroidal sanitizer production, plant based naturopathy product influx in market along with superb feat of getting anti covid vaccine in a short span were some of the key practices during pandemic. Post covid era would be marked by certain unprecedented transformations which seemingly showed positive impact during the pandemic and the experience gained could be used to re strategize for better tomorrow. None the less, it would be too early to conclude the outcomes. Only long term impact analysis could judiciously label the post covid strategic transformations as a boon or a bane.

Conflict of interest: None

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