

Editorial



Resilience in public health towards post-COVID era

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Resilience in simple words denotes capacity to recover quickly from a difficult situation. The concept has become subject to renewed interest and attention in recent times. Often the focus has been around preparedness or mitigating apparent vulnerability to events such as pandemics, extreme weather or internal conflicts. However, the coronavirus pandemic had made us realize that resilience needs to go beyond preparing for isolated events to question the role that institutions, leaders and organizations play in creating capabilities and in shaping society's ability to react to challenges, many of which are unpredictable. To this end, the best definition of resilience in public health is the capacity for populations to endure, adapt and generate new ways of thinking and functioning in the context of change, uncertainty or adversity.

The coronavirus pandemic has posed tremendous pressure on public health systems across the world. Resources have been diverted to surveillance and treatment of COVID-19, leaving other aspects of public health and healthcare at a standstill. For instance, surveillance systems of other diseases, such as non-communicable diseases and other emerging infections such as tuberculosis and sexually transmitted infections have been interrupted. The provision of healthcare, such as mental health services, also declined while the need for such services increased steadily given the impact of the pandemic on mental

stress and anxiety. Across fields, healthcare systems had to quickly adapt to adhere COVID-19 restrictions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also driven healthcare innovations across the world, including novel interventions to deliver healthcare according to new sets of restraints and interventions aimed at promoting recovery and resilience to help mitigate medium and long-term impacts of the pandemic thus making resilience, the utmost topic.

There are three key processes of resilience, namely absorption, adaptation and transformation. A health system needs to be prepared to **absorb** some shocks or minimum changes or redistribution of resources. The system then needs to **adapt** through reallocation of resources and relevant changes to policies and procedures, after which there is a need to be innovative to **transform** the health system to provide appropriate services which are practical and easy to regain.

It is important to understand the key principals of health system resilience in the context of COVID-19 response.

- Develop flexible pathways for medical supplies

Whether it is a pandemic or natural disaster, a resilient health system secures continuity of

provision of medical supply. This may involve developing flexibility in the procurement system and priorities like ensuring buffer stocks.

- Prioritize a list of essential health services

It is vital that prioritizing the most essential services adapting the system to manage the risks and consequences of COVID-19. We should anticipate that we need to adjust priorities as needs evolve over time (e.g., mental health services as a result of fear, loss and isolation). It should be emphasized that an abled system ensures that all priority services are free at the point of use for vulnerable population groups.

- Build trust with local communities

Trust between communities and the health system emerges as a crucial resource. Different health messages, problem in the sequence of messaging may have confused the public. The trust and confidence the public has placed on the public Health Services should be preserved or re-built. Utilizing the excellent primary health care infrastructure in Sri Lanka, it is possible to do within the local context.

- Foster good communication at all system levels

Crises are a time of confusion, threat insecurity and often misinformation for staff and to the public. It is essential to strengthen the communication between different sectors of the health system, including linkages between curative and preventive health sectors.

- Support, recognize and encourage staff

Availability of dedicated staff is an asset, and they can make a significant difference to health system's absorptive, adaptive and transformative capacities. As much as possible, staff actions and achievements in challenging circumstances should be explicitly recognized and rewarded.

- Ensure tracking of health information

All health systems need to ensure that all key data are collected, monitored and used for the evaluation and prediction towards betterment of the nation's health. Innovation in how data is gathered and shared is important but often not happening. All countries must have the necessary capacity and resources to accurately collect data. Surveillance is a backbone of an effective response. Feeding back regularly to frontline responders with updated information should be the culture which is often forgotten. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the importance of data and science to build back more resilient health systems.

- Cultivate effective partnerships and networks

No sector can manage all needs on its own, and especially in a crisis. Resilient system create, reinforce and operate on networks and encourage complementary actions by development partners, civil societies, local leaders, the private sector and community groups. Collaborating across sectors within or across countries is critical to effective response. It is evident when analysing the previous disasters that in a pandemic situation, comprehensive and effective outcomes can be achieved only by the coordinated action

The resilient system can maintain core functions well during a crisis. It protects human life, produces good health outcomes, minimizes social and economic disruption, as it is based on research and experience in health and other fields. It will benefit from further testing and refinement. It demonstrates the capacity to adapt in normal times. This is why the resilience in public health has become important and essential more than ever as we had to face a pandemic caused by COVID-19 and it will definitely take a considerable time to recover as no one is safe until everyone is safe.