



INDIAN COUNCIL OF MEDICAL RESEARCH

Department of Health Research

Press Release

Leading global scientists and vaccine experts call for more innovation in efforts to control COVID-19

Experts emphasize their commitment to importance of patient safety and highest level of ethics while considering options for fast tracking of vaccine trial methods

New Delhi, 30 July 2020 — The Indian Council of Medical Research convened a multi-country online symposium on novel approaches in science and ethics of vaccine development, bringing leading vaccine scientists and researchers to a common platform.

The symposium called on countries and scientific institutions to rapidly advance vaccine trials without cutting corners. In addition, experts agreed that all vaccine trials must and can conform to the highest standards of patient safety and ethical norms while exploring fast tracking methods. Participants also commended the efforts of India in its contributions to vaccine development and preparedness.

Speaking at the symposium the Director of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Professor Peter Piot said, “A vaccine is urgently needed to contain COVID-19. For that we have to work together—bringing science, ethics and communities—to find bold solutions to save lives.”

Prof. K. VijayRaghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India, while opening the symposium said “we cannot afford to let COVID-19 dictate our lives, the scientific community must come together to find a timely solution to this pandemic”.

He highlighted, vaccine development under pandemic conditions is much more challenging than in ordinary times. Ensuring the development of a safe and effective vaccine, in a timely manner, involves understanding the merits of different approaches to development techniques, varied validation approaches, and the ethical considerations around all of them. Above all, the principles of community engagement and informed consent is to be upheld in all vaccine development and rollout efforts.

“India’s research and development capacity will be integrated into global efforts to address COVID-19” said Dr Anthony Fauci, Director, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, USA. He added that when a vaccine is available, India’s private vaccine production sector will have a leading role to play.

The Covid-19 pandemic is unprecedented in its scale, and unprecedented in the way responses have been mounted, at national and global levels. The international symposium was organized by ICMR along with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and the Global Health Security Network (Australia & Canada).

“It is possible to think out of the box while adhering to all global standards for vaccine development,” said Dr Stanley Plotkin, Emeritus Professor, University of Pennsylvania, USA. “COVID-19 does not give us the luxury of time, but challenges us to.”

“India has to be at the forefront of global vaccine preparedness,” said Professor Balram Bhargava, Director-General of ICMR. “We are committed to work with the global scientific community in ensuring that a vaccine is available in a timely manner.”

ICMR is among the world’s most reputed organizations in the field of medical research and regulation and provides leadership and guidance in development and deployment of diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines. It has played a key role in facilitating India’s globally respected and acknowledged vaccine and drug industry.

“Vaccines are a global public good and its production and distribution should adhere to global standards of affordability, availability and equity”, said Prof Indrani Gupta Institute of Economic Growth.

The symposium brought together more than 250 leading scientists, ethicists, public health leaders and community leaders from India and abroad to discuss the challenges and opportunities in vaccine development. International speakers at the meeting included Sir Peter Piot, Dr Anthony S Fauci, Prof. Ole Petter Otterson, Dr Stanley Plotkin, Dr Walter Orenstein, , Prof Heidi Larson, Prof Adam Kamradt-Scott, Prof Marc Lipsitch, Prof Nir Eyal, Prof Adrian Hill, Prof (Dr) Vinod Paul, Prof (Dr) Randeep Guleria, Dr Sanjay Mehendale, Dr VG Somani, Mr Rajesh Bhushan, Mr JVR Prasada Rao, Prof Gagandeep Kang and Prof Jaiprakash Muliyil.

Academics and health activists who took part in the discussions included Prof Indrani Gupta, Prof Rama Baru, Dr Arun Sharma, Dr Anant Bhan, Dr Yogesh Jain and Dr Eric Zomawia. Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh, Regional Director, WHO South East Asia Regional Office and Dr Balram Bhargava, Director-General, ICMR made the closing remarks at the symposium.

About ICMR: The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), New Delhi, the apex body in India for the formulation, coordination and promotion of biomedical research, is one of the oldest medical research bodies in the world. ICMR’s research agenda align with the National health priorities. These efforts are undertaken with a view to reduce the total burden of disease and to promote health and well-being of the population. ICMR promotes biomedical research in the country through intramural as well as extramural research. Visit us at <https://www.icmr.gov.in>

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