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"Authorities the world over must strengthen a PPP mode of tackling the outbreak"- Dr Taslimarif Saiyed

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Dr Taslimarif Saiyed, CEO & Director, C-CAMP shares his views on the current COVID-19 situation



"Novel coronavirus Covid-19 is running amok globally. As the tipping point of the pandemic comes up, how we as Indians step up to the task of containment will be crucial. One of the major factors is India's high population density, especially in urban areas. This could imply an extremely accelerated community transmission if the outbreak cannot be contained.

At C-CAMP we are working to contribute to both Central Govt and State Govt's efforts by sharing and helping deploy the pathbreaking work of some of our innovators and startups in infectious diseases, medical technology, and virology, for prevention, diagnostics, therapeutic and prophylactic approaches.

Examples of such startups would be CoSara, Coeo Labs, Luxmatra, EyeStem, Biomoneta, Coeo Labs, many others and also our translational science program, Discovery to Innovation Accelerator where we are developing microfluidics based multiplex single cell assays for rapid diagnostics.

In light of the current rising trend in infection numbers, as well as scientific evidence based predictions on future course of this global pandemic, we will have a controlled scenario only by July or August.

New cases as shown by Wuhan, China can be halted in about two months' time following lockdown measures.

This is a conservative estimate based on Government measures kicking in to prevent further escalation of the pandemic.

1. WHO has clearly mentioned that narrow case definition and withholding testing for Covid will only be conducive to community spread. Given the ICMR accreditation for private labs across India will significantly bolster efforts to test more. Neuberg Anand Diagnostic Labs, the private lab cleared in Bangalore is a C-CAMP partner and we are looking forward to joining in the combat through our high-end technology platforms. Regulations now need to be eased for making use of such technological resources at C-CAMP and across more research institutes.
2. There is an immediate need for open source science the world over. Global collaborative efforts and sharing of best practices to beat the Corona virus are the need of the hour. The authorities should facilitate greater exchange of ideas and technical expertise. Concerns about IP or commercialisation are secondary at the moment.
3. Relaxation of regulatory approvals for medical technology devices in the sector of ICU, ventilator support, rapid diagnostics will allow many startups in the sector begin manufacturing. Such as CCAMP supported startup CoSara diagnostics who will manufacture their RT PCR kits for testing at a fraction of the current cost in India & the West.
4. Immediate deployment of medtech solutions like CCAMP startup Coeo's VAP-Care a ventilator associated pneumonia preventive device that can prevent secondary infections in the critically ill and reduce mortalities by as much as 30% as per a recent Lancet report that has analysed the Wuhan statistics.

5. The Empowered Committee for Covid 19 response chaired by Prof K Vijayraghavan, PSA and Dr Vinod Paul, NITI Aayog has permitted BSL 3 and BLS 3+ facilities to culture the virus for additional testing and validation of possible therapeutic options Many of the C-CAMP - Bangalore Life Sciences Cluster technology platforms fall under this category and a heightened effort to designate such individual labs across the country for directing research efforts on the virus containment, therapy and vaccines will be very important in the coming days. An organisation such as C-CAMP will be able to bring researchers from academia, startups, industry, and investors all under one roof to take a bench discovery to a marketable solution.
6. The Covid outbreak is more than just a pandemic. The economic and social fallout of the outbreak will be massive and authorities the world over must strengthen a PPP mode of tackling the outbreak. If and when community transmission begins in India, government facilities alone will not be enough. Private players will need to be brought in operation with appropriate price caps to reduce the financial burden on common masses. Private participation in investing in new breakthrough innovations that are emerging will also be key."

Dr Taslimarif Saiyed, CEO & Director, Centre for Cellular and Molecular Platforms (C-CAMP), Bengaluru