

### Uniting for One Health; Better Late than Never



**Prof. (Dr.) Atul Goel**

Director General of Health Service  
Director, National Centre for Disease Control,  
Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India  
E-mail: dghs@nic.in

‘Human beings’ or ‘Homo sapiens’ are one of the most intelligent species that ever existed on Earth, if not in the Universe. The hallmark of this species has been to first ‘create problems’ and then try to find ‘solutions’ to them. Nothing wrong in that approach if we compare it to the approach of ‘modern medicine’ that talks only about diagnostics and therapeutics, there is hardly any thought given to ‘primary passive prevention’. Had there been an approach to preservation of ecosystems, we would not have been addressing ‘One Health’ separately. Health of all living and non-living parts of an ecosystem was always intertwined and dependent on each other.

Most infectious diseases today originate in animals and can thereafter spread globally, due to increasing animal – human interaction, resulting from encroachment on animal territory by human settlement expansion as well as eating habits in certain parts of the world. Increasing human encroachment on nature has resulted biodiversity loss, ecological disruption, and climate change. These have compounded the infectious public health threats that are more distressing to human health in marginal households, especially in middle- and low-income countries. Recent example has been COVID-19 that significantly impacted the entire World since its first reported case in China in the middle of November 2019, and has since resulted in multiple waves of infections, with millions of confirmed cases and hundreds of thousands of deaths, most of them in the second wave during mid-2021.

Response to COVID-19 was significantly important for our Institution, NCDC, as it showcased the importance of Government Health Institutions, both hospitals and the Public Health Institutions. These Institutions stood behind India’s solid response to this grave pandemic. India had followed a flexible, evidence based, and scenario based public health approach to contain COVID and successfully contained it with support from remarkably unified approach from the Federal as well as Government Health and Public Health Sectors in a significant ‘One Health approach and policy’. Governments and Officers at all levels deserve accolades for their openness to vary their response to the needs, with an inspiring ‘Prime Minister’ leading from the front like a ‘true General’.

National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), a premier public health institute in the country, played a pivotal, proactive role in Public Health response since the advent of Covid-19 pandemic, starting from operationalizing the first 24x7 call centre, providing technical expertise and guidance for early detection and response, strengthening surveillance, establishing a National referral laboratory system along with ICMR, infection prevention and control practices, genomic surveillance through INSACOG network, deployment of rapid response teams, case management, logistics, procurement & supply management, risk communication, community engagement, drafting of technical guidelines, SOPs & travel advisories, PIB press releases, inter-sectoral coordination, communication with State Health Departments and International agencies WHO and CDC.

Pandemic outbreak (linked to bats in China) has shown that it is not only about addressing diseases from a human health point of view (zoonoses) but to address the livestock and wildlife also. This has also been evident in outbreaks