Digitisation of immunisation

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Governments spend billions of rupees every year to run vaccinations awareness programmes

Vaccines are the most powerful tool in the history of public health. This is no random belief but a fact, already acknowledged by the global institutions like World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations (GAVI). Still, people in India have misconceptions about the need and effectiveness of these.

However, this disbelief is not the only obstacle the Indian governments and health institutions have been facing over the years in their bid to reach out to every single child. Governments spend billions of rupees every year to run vaccinations awareness programmes and set up vaccination camps, but still our country is no way near its aim of 100% vaccinations. There have been plenty of reasons behind this failure. Some of them are listed below -

1. Paper-based record keeping - This is one of the biggest reasons behind the failure of our vaccination drives. Every year, governments send medical professionals from village to village to immunise every single child, but still, some kids are left unimmunised and some get the same dose twice, which causes severe side-effects. This happens because of the non-existence of a proper plan which can be monitored digitally to eliminate the chances of errors.
2. Lack of awareness - India was recognised as a polio-free nation in 2014. Do you remember, how did we achieve this? It was the result of extraordinary awareness drives which also included some Bollywood superstars and cricketing heroes. But apart from the polio vaccine, people are unaware about almost all other vaccines. Even the urban population has not enough knowledge about how vaccines help in growth and development of a child.
3. Misconceptions about vaccines - There are endless myths surrounding vaccinations in India. Even some educated people believe that their children do not need vaccines as neither them nor their parents ever got vaccinated. Some believe that vaccinations make then infertile, cause autism and even early death. All of these are myths but there are people who promote such beliefs among the uneducated population, inspiring them to lie to the authorities.
4. Prevalence of COVID-19 - Apart from killing people, COVID-19 has also come up as the biggest obstacle in vaccination drives across the world. Recently, WHO also acknowledged that vaccination rates have dropped drastically across the globe since the virus first appeared in December 2019. People are afraid of going to hospitals, and it has also become tougher for governments to set up vaccination camps amid the pandemic.

5. Cost of vaccines - High cost of some vaccines is also one of the reasons behind people opting out of it.
6. Storage issues - Unavailability of proper storage facilities in rural areas is also one of the reasons behind lesser immunisation rate in India. Different vaccines are recommended to be stored in temperatures ranging between 20°C to -50°C.

Now, you must be wondering, what could be the possible solutions to increase the immunisation rate in India? The solutions I am going to list here may not sound very easy to implement but can surely improve the numbers. Have a look-

1. Digital record-keeping - We are living in the technology-driven age right now, and almost every family now owns at least one smartphone. Our focus should be to enter into their smartphones, and keep the vaccination record of their every child digitally. This will help us easily track down the unimmunised children, and the areas where there is a low immunisation percentage. It will also eliminate the chances of double-vaccination.
2. Creating awareness - State and central governments must run aggressive awareness campaigns in association with the biggest celebrities of the country. It will create a belief system among people about vaccines.
3. Tracking down anti-vaccine drives - Tracing and putting an end of anti-vaccine drives should also be the top priority of the authorities. Governments should take legal action against those people and institutions who try to derail the vaccination drives.
4. Creating infrastructure to provide at-home vaccination - This may take time but will help us improve our vaccination numbers to a great extent. Currently, we do not have any set up to reach out to every single home across the country.
5. Reducing the cost - The cost of some vaccines is very high which isn't affordable for every household. Although the governments try to pay a big share of the vaccines cost, it still is a concern for many.
6. Investing in health-tech startups - Governments have been promoting new start-ups over the past few years. Now is the high time, when the governments should shift their focus towards the health-tech startups, which have the potential to contribute towards strengthening the health infrastructure of the country.

Introducing the "digital way" of record keeping will make our research and data more insightful, helping us in tracking down and eliminating the flaws in our system. The other points may take time but "Digitization of Immunisation" will not take a long time to implement.

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