

Challenges in Microbiology Diagnostics in Marginalized Settings - The Indian Scenario

Vasundhara Rangaswamy*

**Various Rural Health Care Organizations, India.*

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ABSTRACT

More than half of India's population resides outside cities. In this population, while non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are seeing a rise in numbers, the burden of infectious or contagious illnesses has remained stagnant over decades. Although polio, plague, guinea worm or small pox like illnesses have been controlled, tuberculosis, scrub typhus, skin infections, pneumonias, systemic parasitic illnesses, to name a few, are still around in large numbers. India contributes to nearly a fourth of the global TB burden. With an accelerated goal to control it by 2025, the diagnostic and social gaps seem too wide to fill up by then. Infectious illnesses also remain a major cause of infant morbidity and mortality in the neglected populations. There is a great need in the rural areas to upgrade infectious disease diagnostic services compared to urban areas. 74% of labs are concentrated in urban areas and hospitals. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare formulated Diagnostic services plans in 2015 however, this remains to be implemented in a systematic manner. Likewise, the health sector spending now at a little over 1%, also needs to be increased especially for enabling better diagnostic care closer to the places where burden is the highest. In this era Digital Health technology is fast growing and reaching the last mile. However, the focus has been more on NCDs and consultations than towards addressing the need for better infectious disease diagnostics. The COVID pandemic got many minds working and discoveries and diagnostic products were made at the fastest pace. We can hope that along with simultaneous socioeconomic development which contributes majorly towards reducing infectious disease burden, affordable, efficient, easy to use tech solutions are also developed for the same.

Keywords: Non-communicable diseases, Ministry of health and family welfare, COVID, Pandemic

Corresponding author: Vasundhara Rangaswamy, Various Rural Health Care Organizations, India, E-mail: vasur2001@yahoo.com

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