Gearing up to the perils of a pandemic

As COVID-19 tightens its grip relentlessly, overwhelming mankind with its sinister spread that spares none, it is the sacrosanct responsibility of every institution to act in earnest not only to contain but also to conquer the scourge that threatens our very survival. For its part, Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology, Trivandrum, has been quick to hear, and respond to, the call of duty at this hour of crisis when an ominous spectre of uncertainty looms large as never before in recent history. An Institute of National Importance under the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India, the institution has an exceptional track record of creditable service in the vital domains of patient care, public health and the indigenous development of biomedical technologies that have been transferred to industry and commercialized. Ceaselessly striving, and never swerving from its lofty Mission, the last 3-4 years have witnessed rapid strides along the diverse dimensions of the Institute's distinct mandate. The recent introduction of many minimally-invasive procedures represents a significant advance in patient care at Sree Chitra. These include new pacing modalities, Fenestrated Thoracic Endovascular Aortic Repair for aortic arch aneurysm, hybrid procedures for congenital heart defects and percutaneous valve replacement and stenting of the right ventricular outflow tract in select patients, to cite a few. On the other hand, the development of about 18 new biomedical technologies and the initiation of 40 research projects in biomedical engineering and technology would stand out as major recent contributions of the Institute to the alleviation of human suffering. These achievements are an unmistakable testimony to the Institute's abiding commitment to deliver on all its promises.



While these are commendable by any reckoning, Sree Chitra realizes the urgent need to take cognizance of the perils of the pandemic and act swiftly to meet the unfolding challenge before it wreaks irreparable damage. Important measures have been put in place to take on the threat on multiple fronts. To begin with, the Institute tapped into the unstinted support of the state authorities and, in accordance with all relevant guidelines, mobilized its resources to screen all susceptible employees for infection and to ensure proper sanitation of the premises. This timely action has provided a safe workplace for its staff and scores of patients for whom the expertise the Institute offers in clinical super-specialities and sub-specialties has been a timeless benediction. Having achieved that, efforts have been made to provide uninterrupted high priority services to patients, including emergency surgeries and adequate care of those attending the outpatient units. The Institute has initiated telemedicine consultation for those seeking review for cardiac and neurological ailments.

In quick time, two laboratories have been set up and are functional at the Institute to screen people suspected to have contracted the infection.

The Achutha Menon Centre at the Institute is actively involved in supporting the State in the containment of COVID-19 through the COVID Cell at the Institute and the State Health Department. A number of new initiatives and proposals are being prepared for the State Health Department in order to assist the state government in dealing with the problem.

To counter the pandemic comprehensively, the Biomedical Technology Wing has commenced work on several technologies related to the rapid diagnosis of COVID-19, face shielding, automated respiratory support using a simple device, ventilator sharing kit, hospital bed partitions, biomaterials, molecular biological solutions to tackle COVID-19 and many others. The development of relevant devices and accessories would help overcome the imminent shortage of these critical tools that are required to combat the affliction and ensure their easy availability at affordable costs.

Needless to say, all of these are cost-intensive but the situation beckons us to urgently shore up resources as we cannot back down when we face an unanticipated threat on an unprecedented scale. We have all it takes to rise to the demands of these testing times and we need to scale up and sustain our activities at the Institute because the ultimate beneficiary of our well-meaning endeavours shall be our fellow citizens. We greatly appreciate, and are immensely grateful to, **Shri Thomas John Muthoot, Chairman and Managing Director, Muthoot Fincorp**, who has thoughtfully volunteered to make a generous donation from the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Funds of the Company. Let us all get together at this hour of anguish and win this battle. We have no choice but to win.