

BOOK REVIEW

Book Review: ‘Till We Win - India’s fight against the COVID-19 Pandemic’

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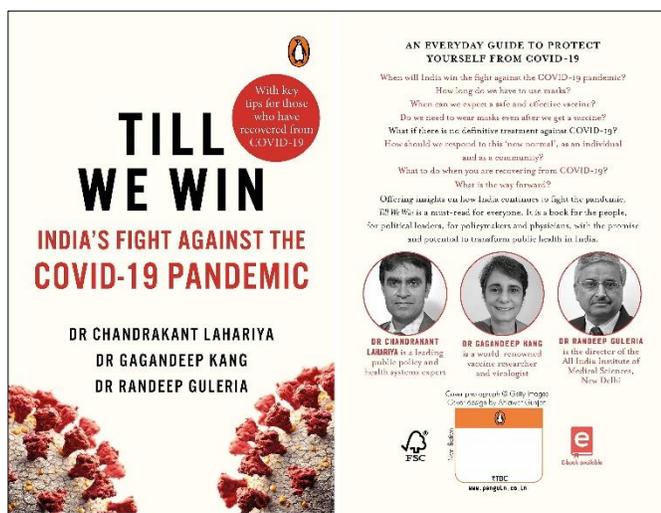
Citation

Kakkar R, Aggarwal P. Book Review: ‘Till We Win- India’s fight against the COVID-19 Pandemic’. Indian J Comm Health. 2020; 32(4): 755-756. <https://doi.org/10.47203/IJCH.2020.v32i04.028>
Source of Funding: Nil Conflict of Interest: None

Article Cycle

Received: 21/12/2020; Revision: 24/12/2020; Accepted: 29/12/2020; Published: 31/12/2020

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Dr Chandrakant Lahariya, Dr Gagandeep Kang, Dr Randeep Guleria (Authors). (Penguin Random House India) 2020. 338 pages. ISBN 9780143451808

‘Till We Win’ provides a comprehensive overview of India’s journey and response to the COVID-19 pandemic and is a must-read book, for everyone. It documents and deliberates how India, as a nation, fought and continue to fight against the novel coronavirus, SARS CoV-2. It is a book as much for general readers (who will benefit and get insight on how to stay safe during the pandemic) as it is a book for health policy makers. The analytical overview of the COVID-19 pandemic responses and lessons to strengthen India’s health systems reflect the breadth and depth of expertise of the authors.

The book has four sections and eleven chapters. The first section focuses upon why viruses are likely to cause pandemic and how human activities are increasing the risks of outbreaks and epidemics. The second section deliberates on India’s pandemic response and how the policies and strategies had evolved, with every emerging situation. The authors argue that no country was fully prepared to respond to the pandemic of such a magnitude, which has disrupted nearly every ‘health system’, across the world.

Third section covers what people need to know and understand about the COVID-19 vaccines and therapies. A broad range of frequently asked questions in this section addresses key queries, which any readers may have in his/her mind. The last section has been titled as "Getting future ready". One of the chapters in this section is on the health system strengthening and universal health coverage. The suggestions in this chapter on how to strengthen India’s health systems are very practical and would be useful for the policy makers, program managers and public health experts alike. This chapter, in our opinion, is one of the best descriptions and explanations of the concept of health systems.

Various chapters and sections in the book delves into the challenge faced during the pandemic and then the strategies adopted starting with ‘the lockdown’ to contain the infection & getting health systems ready, followed by working for ‘the new normal’ by ‘unlocking’ in the phase wise manner. The authors have detailed the intricacies in

the pandemic response in the settings such as Dharavi, Mumbai, which provides useful learnings for pandemic response in other settings as well as for future. A chapter dedicated on frontline health workers and essential services workers and their selfless fight against the virus is a must read for everyone. The last chapter in the book would be of special interest for every family member, as it describes, in an exhaustive manner, how to remain safe and healthy during the pandemic and beyond. A main strength of the book is that it provides balanced account of success and challenges of the efforts made by the union and state governments and the non-governmental organizations, in an unbiased manner.

One of the key highlights of the book that most chapters carry the key learnings from that specific period for strengthening India's health systems. The book, as authors have described, is as much about responding to the pandemic as it is about strengthening health systems. The authors have argued that the victory against pandemic will be complete, only when the lessons are learnt and used. The authors have underscored the need for increasing the government investment on health services, urgent need for scaling up of mental health services, need for community participation in health services and focus on public health services.

The authors are renowned and the leading experts in fields of public health, epidemiology, virology, vaccines and clinical medicines. The book lives up to every expectation. The writing style is lucid and concise and makes it very readable for both general readers as well as people with subject expertise, in health sector and public policy.

A limitation of the book is limited emphasis on the general public perspective about the situation, their pain, worries and understanding about the disease. However, it is understandable as the book focuses upon health sector response to the pandemic.

Overall, 'Till We Win' is a timely publication, which provides much needed information about health sector response to COVID-19 pandemic in India. The book will work as a useful guide not only for the general readers but also for political leaders, policymakers, public health specialist and the physicians. It is must read book for the graduate and post graduate students in health & social sciences. 'Till We Win' is a book with long shelf life and merit a place in libraries of every medical and nursing colleges, as well as in personal collection of every household in India.