2. India Joins WHO for Solidarity Trials

Prelims Syllabus: Medicine and Pharmaceuticals

Mains Syllabus: GS-II Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector or Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Why in News?

- India is all set to join the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Solidarity Trial which aims at rapid global search for drugs to treat COVID-19.

What are the Key Points?

- India has stayed away from the multi-country trial till now due to its small sample size.
- It will express its interest to participate in the trial for the Indian population when it feels that the time is right.
- Vaccine development wasn't a priority for Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) currently because there are around 30 vaccine groups already in operation worldwide.
- Keeping in view the rising number of cases and challenges faced by India, the government has decided to participate in the solidarity trial.

How Solidarity Trial Done?

- It will test different drugs or combinations like:
  1. Remdesivir.
  2. Combination of lopinavir and ritonavir (anti-HIV drugs).
  3. Interferon beta with the combination of lopinavir and ritonavir.
  4. Chloroquine.
- It will compare their effectiveness to the standard of care, the regular support used by the hospitals treating COVID-19 patients.

What are the Key Challenges?

- **Shortage of Medical Devices and Equipment:** The Medical Technology Association of India (MTAI), which represents research-based medical technology companies, has highlighted the shortage of medical devices and Equipment.
  - ✓ The Centre has exempted manufacturing, warehousing and distribution of the medical devices and equipment from the lockdown but these are being clamped down by the state governments and local level administrators.
  - ✓ Transport trucks carrying these vital preparatory materials are stuck at city and state borders.

- **Delays in Import:** India is importing probes and rapid testing kits from China, Germany and WHO. However, some delays have been reported but it is made sure that the delays do not affect the testings.
- **Time Constraints:** ICMR is currently looking at repurposed drug molecules to find treatment for COVID-19 due to time constraints.

What could be the Possible Solutions?

- India needs to Prioritise what it needs right now to deal with the situation.
- Indian scientists have formed a group called Indian Scientists' Response to COVID-19 (ISRC) to tackle the pandemic.
- While governmental bodies make their decisions and professional scientific academies take principled stands, there is a need for individuals in the scientific community to also help individually and collectively.

Indian Scientists' Response to COVID-19:

- Indian Scientists' Response to COVID-19 (ISRC) is a voluntary group of scientists to address the concerns raised by the COVID-19 outbreak and to discuss the rapidly evolving situation with its dire need for science communication.
- The group consists of nearly 200 scientists from institutions such as the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS), the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), the Indian Institute of Technologies (IITs), etc.
- It aims to study existing and available data to bring out analysis that will support the Central, State and local governments in carrying out their tasks.
- **There are several working groups within it:**
  - ✓ One of them works on hoax busting to address disinformation spreading with respect to the coronavirus.
  - ✓ One works on science popularisation to develop material that explains concepts such as home quarantine.
- Other groups work on resources in Indian Languages, Mathematical Models and Apps Etc.
  - ✓ It is suggested that an app should be developed that can map spaces being used as shelters and share that data with the State governments.
- A platform has also been developed to connect people in need with those who can provide help.
  - ✓ It works through two channels, phone and WhatsApp.

- ✓ It can connect patients or people with symptoms to doctors.
- ✓ It may also connect elderly people with volunteers from NGOs to assist in chores such as grocery shopping.