

## **Patanjali's COVID-19 Drug - Claims and Concerns**

### **What is the issue?**

- Yoga guru Ramdev's Patanjali Ayurved recently launched what he claimed was the first ayurvedic medicine to cure COVID-19.
- This unscientific claim raises the need for ICMR and CSIR to call out any breach of due process in the appraisal of any drug.

### **How was the clinical trial carried out?**

- Patanjali Ayurved said in Haridwar that its product, 'Coronil', had cured everyone in a clinical trial.
- As it now emerges, the company has probably misrepresented the drug's efficacy.
- The clinical trial tested the drug on 45 and another 50 were administered a placebo.
- [A placebo is a medicine or procedure prescribed for the psychological benefit to the patient rather than for any physiological cure or effect]
- All of the participants had tested positive for the virus.
- On the third day, 31 who were given the drug recovered and 25 of those on the placebo recovered.
- That is not a measurable improvement considering the small number enrolled in the trial.
- Moreover, they were mildly symptomatic.
- Ramdev claimed that by the seventh day, all had recovered.
- If this also included all those on the placebo, then it further weakens the claim that it was the drug alone that worked.
- The doctors in the trial have spelt out on the clinical trials registry the process they would employ to test the drug.
- But they said they had neither published their results nor submitted it for peer-review.
- Clearly, the company's claim of a cure by all accounts was a clear subversion of the scientific process.

### **What are the larger concerns involved?**

- The unrelenting spread of COVID-19 has set off both mass anxiety and a dire search for a panacea.

- On the other hand, this fear has paved way for the profiteers.
- The Patanjali Ayurved's claim bypassed every regulatory requirement without any serious consequence so far.
- This shows that India's regulatory checks and balances are seriously inadequate.
- The declarations on the success of the drug could not be ignored.
- This is because there is tremendous influence that its products wield on the public.
- Its claim to have proved the product through a clinical trial makes it open to evaluation by the standards of modern medicine.

### **What is the way forward?**

- The issue deserves a mention of the episode with hydroxychloroquine (HCQ). Click [here](#) to know more.
- More than the outcome, it is the method deployed that ought to be scrutinised by scientists, in clinical trials.
- This is crucial to reinforce public trust in scientific assessment.
- There has always been a tension between traditional Indian systems of medicine and pharmaceutical drugs.
- But now, there is a consensus in India's regulatory system that claims by both systems of developing safe efficacious drugs must pass clinical trials.
- So, it is now well within the domain of institutions of the ICMR or the CSIR or national science academies.
- They should call out a breach of due process in the appraisal of any drug, whether allopathic, ayurvedic or homeopathic, failing which would amount to criminal negligence.

**Source: The Hindu**