

## **Sweeping Lockdowns have similarities to Chemo-therapy**

My previous post, '*Data is Oil, but People drive Performance*' was Lesson No. 13 that built on an earlier post, '*Twelve Policy Lessons from Covid*'. This is Lesson 14 that I have learnt from policy responses to the Covid.

Broadly, people are talking of

- the South Korean model, where Covid was contained with smart use of technology, and knowledge management from past outbreaks, but without a lockdown; and
- the Western model adopted in US & Europe, where the battle against Covid continues with a lockdown.

This post is not about whether the lock-down was required. Without doubt, lock-downs have controlled the spread of Covid, and given time for health infrastructure to cope. At the same time, I do not agree with the geometric progressions touted by a few, about what might have been the number of cases without a lockdown. Those geometric progressions make an implicit assumption of *ceteris paribus* (other things remaining the same). If other things were to remain the same, then Governments have no reason to exist. I am sure most elements of the South Korean model can be blended with the lock-down model of the West for more effective containment.

The severity of the lockdown varies between countries. The lockdown in India is widely accepted as the most stringent and sweeping, affecting a nation of 1.3 billion people (2<sup>nd</sup> in the world) and an area of 3.3mn sq feet (8<sup>th</sup> in the world). Even in China, the lock-down was limited geographically, although it was more stringent.

As India nears the next judgment day of May 3, the similarities of the lockdown with Chemo-therapy are striking. Most of us who have seen cancer at close quarters agree that at times, chemo-therapy as a cure feels worse than the disease. The harshness of chemo-therapy comes from its weakness in differentiating between good cells and bad cells in the body.

The sweeping nature of the lockdown, bordering on the quixotic (for example, student books can be purchased, but not professional books; biscuits can be purchased but not sweets & cakes) is only one reason why the lockdown feels harsh. The icing on the cake (which we are not permitted to buy!), is the weak differentiation between clear zones and containment zones. An entire state (e.g. Goa) can have nearly-zero cases, and still be under the same lockdown rules as Maharashtra, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh with their spiralling cases. Similarly, within states too, the differentiation between clear zone and containment zones is virtually non-existent in the lockdown therapy. We need to recognise that larger the geography, more the need for localized solutions. Localised radiation therapy on specific parts of the body, can supplement – or even eliminate - the chemo-therapy affecting the entire body.

Medical research worldwide is trying to improve targeting of bad cells in chemo-therapy (indeed, in all therapies for all ailments). Considering that Covid-type viral attacks cannot be ruled out in future, there is undoubtedly a need to conceptualise smarter lockdowns that are better targeted at the holy grail of virus containment viz. social distancing. The lesser the lockdown is made to feel like a punishment, the greater the chances of compliance, especially if such lockdowns were to become frequent and long-drawn.