

# Key issues related to COVID-19 health care system: Lessons learnt from Thailand

**Sukhontha Kongsin**

Department of Public Health Administration, Mahidol University, Thailand

## **ABSTRACT**

**Summary:** Thailand is a high middle-income country with export-led economy based on trade and foreign direct investment. The COVID-19 pandemic has serious impact on health system, Thai economy and people due to unemployment in services and manufacturing sectors. First phase of the outbreak, Thai Government established the Centre for COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA) as special task force. Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) has formulated a management strategy focusing on comprehensive, proactive response by activating EOC (Emergency Operation Centre). Phase 2 was controlled by limited local transmission, emphasis on test, treat and immunization. Phase 3-4 were sustained local transmission and mitigation waves included patient care, prevention of large outbreak and vaccination. Five Key Lessons Learnt from Thailand's COVID-19 Response are 1) Invest in health facilities. Investment in healthcare infrastructure has prepared Thailand well for the pandemic. More than 1,000 public hospitals and 10,000 primary health care facilities provide medical and primary healthcare services and accommodate COVID-19 patients. 2) Universal health coverage (UHC). Since 2002, Thailand has achieved universal health coverage. During the outbreak, essential healthcare is provided to all infected people including foreigners without financial barriers. 3) The help of more than one million village health volunteers These volunteers who complemented primary healthcare services at community level undertook door-to-door visits for health education, active case finding, disease surveillance and quarantine. 4) Early action. Screening passengers from Wuhan, People's Republic of China (PRC) was initiated within three days after PRC's announcement of cases of pneumonia. The first confirmed COVID-19 case outside PRC prompted strong public health measures and campaigns. A whole-of-government approach established the Center for COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA), chaired by the Prime Minister and top political leaders. 5) Nationwide public cooperation on effective social measures. Daily press conferences by CCSA's spokesperson and by MOPH executives/experts provided essential information to public. **Conclusion:** Strong, well-resourced and inclusive medical and public health systems, vaccination campaign and administrative systems has been integrated to fight the epidemic. A 'whole of society' approach means, "Nobody is safe unless Everybody is safe". We are strong, not because we are rich, because we fight and we do not give up.