

Message from the WHO Representative to India World TB Day



24 March is commemorated as the World TB Day. This day, 131 year ago, Sir Robert Koch made the disclosure before the Physiological Society of Berlin of his discovery of mycobacterium tuberculosis, the cause of the scourge in Europe at that time: Tuberculosis. World TB Day is an occasion for us to look back, reflect and plan for future. It is also an occasion to garner support, mobilize resources and support governments to strengthen the TB control programmes.

India's Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme (RNTCP) started more than a decade back using WHO DOTS strategy. It has substantial gains to its credit. More than 50 million TB symptomatics have been examined; more than 15 million TB patients treated and nearly 3 million additional lives have been saved in the country since the inception of RNTCP. The programme has consistently achieved more than 85 percent success rate. Both prevalence and mortality has halved and the trend in incidence has started reversing. These are substantial achievements. However, we are also aware that at least every third case is still missed from the programme, the case notification is stagnating, every sixth case is still dying and the incidence decline is slow. Over 80 percent of multi drug resistant tuberculosis cases are not diagnosed or treated properly. Large number of TB patients are diagnosed and treated in the private sector with varying quality and hardly any patient support system.

These are very many challenges but they also provide great opportunities. Government of India's National Strategic Plan (NSP) for 2012-17 with the vision of 'TbFree India' is a path-breaking initiative. WHO supports both the intent and strategies for the Universal Access to TB Care, which is the core element of the NSP.

India needs to strive hard to fight the battle of tuberculosis control with effective strategies for health system strengthening, both in public and private sector. Bold policies and systems for implementation on notification, drug regulation, early diagnosis of TB including drug resistance, quality treatment in all sectors with necessary patient support services, better utilization of community support systems are all urgently required.

Newer diagnostic tests, newer drugs and regimens, better vaccines and service coverage strategies are also needed. Further, operational research should lead to better policies and practices.

The theme of World TB Day 2013, 'Stop TB in my lifetime' provides everyone an opportunity to introspect and ask the important question: "To stop TB in my life time, what can I do?"

WHO is committed to providing necessary technical guidance and assistance to the central and state governments to strengthen their programmes; we will also continue to partner all stakeholders on our common resolve of fighting TB.



Dr Nata Menabde
WHO Representative to India

STOP TB IN MY LIFETIME