

Awakening

to Crises of the

TB Endemic

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Tuberculosis or TB is one of the major causes of death worldwide. India is worst affected, followed by China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Pakistan, Nigeria, Bangladesh and South Africa. About 25 % of total TB patients are in India and 600 people on an average die from TB every day. At the same time, TB is curable and preventable. The death rate in India is falling due to improved diagnosis and treatment, though slowly. We have a long way to go before we can eliminate TB endemic by 2025, a target set by India.



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The recognition of the elimination of TB as one of the sustainable development goals is a testimony of its importance to humanity. The goal of the free world from TB has to be linked with other sustainable developmental goals as well. The most important goal in this regard relates to ending poverty from the world. Each human being should get adequate support for fulfilling its basic needs. Balanced economic growth and inclusive growth are key to reduce poverty. Improved nutrition to the poorest is vital as undernourished are at increased risk, almost three times more. Access to affordable health care for early diagnosis and treatment of TB patients is another critical issue. The 'Aayushman Bharat' program is the right step in this direction. The National Tuberculosis Control Program has also focused on increasing access to health care for TB patients. The current standard of care is long and stressful for the patients leading to non-compliance that result in drug-resistant TB. Other socio-economic conditions, availability of clean fuel for cooking, air pollution, unemployment, poor built-environment and crowding in homes and lack of awareness especially among women need to be addressed at the earliest. Most patients are socially marginalised people. Dis-empowerment and stigma put unnecessary psychological pressure on patients to come out and seek help.

India, recently, has eradicated polio, by very innovative approaches for reaching to each and every child. Similarly, India needs to take a lead in developing a strategy to greatly enhance its efforts to eradicate TB. One of the most important steps is to develop an information system based on GIS for monitoring and reporting each and every case and how the implementation of the national program is being carried out at local, state and district levels. Adequate investment in research and innovation for developing affordable drugs, providing access to diagnosis, treatment, care and research has to be ensured. Though India has almost quadrupled its funding from Rs 800 to Rs 3300 crore during 2016 to 2018, it may need more than Rs 10,000 crore per year to achieve the target. India has to show great political will and involve all stakeholders, pharma companies, civil society and the private sector and commit themselves towards achieving the task of eradication of TB. I am sure this magazine is a small but very critical effort towards realising this goal. My compliments to them and wish very best for this noble initiative.