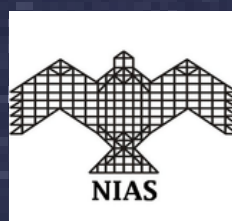


FINDING THE HERO WITHIN

**UPENDRA KUMAR
TB CHAMPION**

GARHWA DISTRICT, JHARKHAND



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Upendra Kumar is a tuberculosis survivor and Champion from Garhwa District in Jharkhand. In 2015, Upendra first developed symptoms of TB. He faced a lot of stigma and discrimination from his family and neighbours and tried to keep his TB diagnosis a secret. “I remember – I had been coughing for some time, and I thought it was a normal cough,” he recollects. Although his health didn’t improve, he did not tell his family as he thought they would get worried. Upendra happened to meet a health worker in the neighbourhood, and they discussed his condition. On the health worker’s advice, he went to the Primary Health Centre (PHC) in Ramna, where he was eventually diagnosed with TB.

Upendra was devastated and started panicking. “I am the eldest in a family of ten siblings; I didn’t know what to do. I had to look after the family, but my ill health did not allow me to work,” he says. Upendra did not tell anyone except his wife about his TB diagnosis. For the first 45 days, he experienced severe side effects of the medicines. “The doctor and the health worker were helpful. There were meetings at the PHC every 15 to 20 days, and instructions were given about the treatment. We were also given an allowance to get nutritious food,” he says.

After three to four months, Upendra felt his brothers had come to know about his diagnosis. “I did not tell them, but from their behaviour, I realised they knew. They must have been worried that they might also get TB,” he says. He also recalls that when people in the neighbourhood realised that he had TB, they did not want to be around him. Finally, Upendra completed the six-month-long treatment and was declared cured.

In 2018, Upendra attended a capacity-building workshop for TB survivors organised by REACH, a non-profit organisation. He learned to work as a ‘TB Champion’ at the workshop, supporting people with TB and sensitising communities about the disease. Since then, he has helped nearly 500 people with TB and has transformed from a shy and reserved person into a vocal and committed TB Champion.

As a TB Champion, he has conducted many meetings to raise awareness about TB. “I educate people about the symptoms of TB. It is important to be tested for TB if there are symptoms. One should not be misled by the advice of quacks as it happened to me. Those diagnosed with TB should take the right dosage of medicines and on time. This way, we can make Jharkhand TB-free,” he says.

In 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the country and lockdowns were in place, several people with TB did not know how to get their medicines as they could not come to the TB centre. At that time, Upendra stepped up to the challenge and delivered medicines at the doorsteps of people in his block, ensuring he maintained COVID-appropriate behaviour.

“During my visits, I would tell people to wear masks and wash hands frequently. Now that vaccines are available, I encourage people around me to take them to prevent falling severely ill with COVID-19. So far, I have personally ensured that over 200 people, including my family members, take the vaccine,” he says with pride.

Upendra is also the President of Jharkhand's survivor-led network TEJ (TB Elimination from Jharkhand) and a member of the TB Forums at the state and district levels. He dreams of a future free of discrimination against people affected by TB. Watch this [film](#) on Upendra’s journey as a TB Champion.